



THE IRISH HIGH CROSS: WHY BUILD ONE?

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Text

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to shed light on the impetus behind the development of the distinctive ringed form of the early Irish High Cross. This will be achieved through an investigation of the High Crosses from within the wider tradition of early medieval standing stones. It is proposed that High Crosses represent a communication innovation which was tailored for an Irish audience. From this perspective, the crosses' discourse as media within a communication system will be explored. This will involve an examination of: the cross form as a medium choice; identification and goals of their creators; the audience and their requirements; issues relating to the communication and interpretation of their messages; and considerations of the socio-cultural context in which we find them employed. This investigation of the crosses as medium centres on exploration of the early Irish Christian goal to orientate Irish society within the Christian cosmos. The result of this investigation will provide an explanation for the continued development and evolution of the High Crosses as medium, and an answer to the question: Why build an Irish High Cross?

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QUOTATIONS

'We may not share experiences, but we can share symbols'

Into the Looking Glass Wood, Alberto Manguel, 1999

'The purpose of a sign is to supplement the ideas of life of which I, the interpreter, am a part – ideas which I have drawn directly from my own life – with a copy of a scrap torn out of another's life, or rather from his panorama of all life, his general view of life, and I need to know just where on my own panorama of universal life I am to insert a recopy of this copied scrap'

Charles Pierce, 1907

'He had bought a large map representing the sea,
Without the least vestige of land:
And the crew were much pleased when they found it to be a map they could all understand.

"What's the good of Mercator's North Poles and Equators, Tropics and Meridian Lines?"

So the Bellman would cry: and the crew would reply

"They are merely conventional signs!"

Lewis Carroll, Fit the second, Hunting of the Snark, 1876

'The populace is by nature fickle; it is easy to persuade them of something, but difficult to confirm them in that persuasion'.

The Prince, Machiavelli

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study centres on an elementary question, why did the early Christian Irish build the High Crosses? To date most studies have focused on the 'what' and 'when' of High Crosses, with these questions dominating the body of scholarly research. The majority have focused on defining and categorising the development and diversity of the High Crosses. Historically, studies were hindered by the availability of information and lack of a complete corpus of the Irish High Crosses. As a result, much of the initial work in this field has tended to focus on the 'more interesting' scriptural crosses rather than the broader range of cross morphology and decoration. Some of these issues have been addressed by the publication of Harbison's 1992 *Iconographic and Photographic Survey of the Irish High Crosses* (IHCPS) and more recent regional archaeological surveys. Furthermore, many of these studies have been content to leave its form – as a self-evident proclamation of Christianity – to speak for itself. This thesis seeks to reexamine Irish High Crosses by exploring the 'why', 'by whom' and 'for whom' questions in more detail. To facilitate this line of enquiry a shift in perceptions of the crosses in terms of their development and the context that we find them is needed.

Broadly, this investigation will involve exploring what characteristics define and differentiate the morphology of the High Crosses within Ireland. This will include contextualising this by an examination of the implications of the introduction of the High Crosses into a preceding tradition of standing stones and their relatively unexplored role as a public medium at this time. The impact, from this perspective, on the High Crosses' initial construction and development has not been fully investigated as shall be demonstrated. While the focus of this study will be on the role of the Irish crosses – and as a result, the particular circumstances that surround the establishment of the Christian church in Ireland – it is also important to recognise that neighbouring cultures in the insular region had their own freestanding cross traditions. It is likely that while there was a unique Irish expression of High Crosses that there was some cross-fertilisation in techniques, usage and symbolism between these different traditions.

The nature of the Irish High Cross form as an indigenous development will be explored but this line of thought does not shed much light on the impetus for why they were built. While the High Cross form, as a monument, was 'original' to the region it shows influences from other Christian centres – especially the east. The expression of this tradition can be shown to be unique to Ireland but many of its defining features cannot be considered original. The strong connection of the High Cross and primary Christian symbolism from the east shall be developed across the different chapters of this study. The importance of this eastern Christian symbolism, in particular the symbolism associated with the location and structures of the Holy Sepulchre, in

driving the coherency of the High Cross form and usage will be discussed at the conclusion of this study. The aim of this research will be to explore and reevaluate these connections based on a clearer understanding of the Irish context of their development. While eastern influences can be demonstrated to be key drivers in the development of the High Cross form there are local factors that need equal consideration in the development and refinement of this tradition. This can be achieved by contextualising the High Cross within the preceding and concurrent use of other standing stones and cultural changes occurring in early Christian Ireland. These other stones appear to have had a variety of purposes and communications abilities that can offer insights to the utility of the High Crosses. What set the High Crosses apart from these traditions are several factors: their monumental size, the complexity of their construction, the relatively consistent use of symbolic form, and their introduction of figurative and aniconic decorations to communicate. Additionally, the contexts that we find them indicate a variety of uses – possibly in common with other freestanding crosses. Significantly, these public artefacts were viewable by a broad audience and this affects how we should perceive their role in socio-cultural discourse.

One of the main areas of research into the High Crosses is the question of the origins of the tradition itself. This consists of two main areas of focus: firstly, where did the tradition of erecting monumental crosses originate; and secondly, where did symbolism of the ringed cross motif originate and why was it developed? This thesis shall forward new interpretations of both of these questions based on the findings from the proceeding discussion. The conclusions shall demonstrate that the correlation between these two areas of investigation have not been explored extensively in terms of explaining the continued development of the monumental ringed cross form. As stated, while the ringed High Cross is closely associated with Ireland, monumental crosses are also found in neighbouring cultures and other Christian centres on the continent and the east. Furthermore, the ringed cross motif – of which there are many variations and expressions – are found in other contexts of use independent of the freestanding cross form. This study will seek to clarify the meaning associated with the ringed cross motif so that this explains both its adoption for the High Cross form but also accounts for its popularity and longevity in other Christian centres. The relationship of the symbolism of this motif and the High Cross and its subsequent development as a monumental tradition is not one that has been explored fully with the aim of explaining their purpose. Part of exploring this symbolic correlation involves evaluating the view, proposed in this thesis, that since the crosses were built in this specific form, this choice of form can best be comprehended from understanding the symbolism of the cross morphology – not just the ringed cross but the composite symbolism of the cross morphology as a complete entity¹. The originality of the High Cross is found less in the

¹ Since symbols are polysemous (Hodder 1987:3) and often not limited in use to one interpretation it is important to recall that meaning resides in the system of relationships that they are used for rather than in the symbols themselves (Tilley 1996:173)

monumental form, but more in the way that its morphological features were assembled and developed for specific purposes.

Traditionally, with the focus being on the more decorated and developed cross forms, High Crosses are considered to be either ‘Scriptural Crosses’ or less developed. These perceptions are also driven to some extent by morphological characteristics such as perforated ringed crossheads - a large proportion of the High Crosses have solid ringed heads - that show greater sophistication in construction techniques; these more architectural forms also account for the majority of the crosses with more developed plastic figurative iconic depictions. What has not been satisfactorily explored is why these specific developments were adopted. This thesis takes the view that the High Cross development towards more complex monumental morphologies represent the evolution of the High Cross as a medium and its usage as such². However, to borrow a clarification of the definition of evolution from the biologist Matt Ridley, evolution as a process is to ‘solve a problem’³. If we perceive the experimentation with the cross-form from the earlier crosses as evidence of evolution, it raises the question of what was the problem(s) they were trying to solve. We can see evidence of structural advancements and the emergence of a more unified and coherent cross form as the cross tradition matures. Possibly this might be attributed to a refinement in techniques, tools and materials. However, at the same time the cross as a communication platform also appears to be undergoing a concurrent, and possibly independent, evolution from aniconic decoration to the highly figurative and more naturalistic plastic iconographic panels found on later crosses⁴. It is important to recognise what was driving these changes: specifically, what structural and communication problems were ‘solved’ by the continued development of the crosses beyond merely aesthetic considerations? These questions can be answered in part by exploring what morphological and symbolic features were developed from the start of the tradition; which features were not; and what innovations were implemented by the time that ‘Scriptural Crosses’ were developed. An understanding of these changes are fundamental to addressing the ‘why’ question.

Furthermore, by presenting a contextual appraisal of influences in their evolution this might offer new insights into what was driving experimentation and changes in their development. Central to this contextual reevaluation are three premises that need to be tested: First off, that the crosses show considerable development over time corresponding with significant social, cultural, economic and spiritual changes in Ireland. Second, can they be evaluated by their role as a communication medium rather than as a work of art? Subsequent to this, in order to answer why

² The argument for not seeing the development of the High Crosses as solely an art style on aesthetic grounds will be developed across the course of this study.

³ Ridley (1993:31) ‘Evolving is not a goal but a means of solving a problem’

⁴ The contexts and locations that we find these more developed crosses also change compared to other freestanding crosses, often corresponding with changes in the nature and relationship to its community.

they were built, the question of why other artefacts or forms were not considered in preference must also be addressed. Third, considering that they represent an 'original' form of public monument in the region, understanding why they were built necessitates an understanding of both whom they were built by and who they were built for and the relationship between these forces in order to develop an understanding of the communication context and discourse.

Contextually, the emergence of the High Cross tradition it is only one element of a diverse range of changes that were occurring in Ireland at this time. There were other socio-cultural, economic and spiritual changes that were effecting not only Ireland but also the rest of Europe and the East. However, what was different for Ireland compared to other parts of Europe and Britain is that it had not been exposed to direct Roman settlement. The era of the introduction of Christianity brought with it significant socio-cultural changes such as a shift from an oral culture to a literate one. There are many challenges that must have eventuated from a communications point of view, and the task involved in translating⁵ and tailoring the introduction and education of a new belief system based on the written word.

What were the High Crosses meant to communicate? By disassembling the many secular and ecclesiastical purposes attributed to the High Crosses one gets the impression that they were intended to communicate more than one message⁶. The delivery of these messages appears to have been tailored to the specific requirements of an Irish audience. The High Crosses functioned as a versatile communication system that can be shown to be capable of communicating disparate and thematic messages without contradiction or diminishing the medium – the cross itself. Furthermore, the coherency of these messages appears united by the symbolism of the structure of the cross itself. However, the utility of the High Cross was not limited to a single function like some of the simpler freestanding stones that can be found in similar contexts. The High Crosses can be demonstrated to have secular uses - political, social and economic as well as obvious prominent spiritual roles. Notably, the combination of these

⁵ Keeping in mind the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Whorf 1956) purports that the language we use determines the way we think about the world. With this in mind, different cultures perceive the world in different ways and presented challenges of expression that might have contributed to driving communication innovations. Ong (1982), to be discussed following, has detailed the challenges of communication between oral and literary cultures and the differences in how information is expressed.

⁶ These messages might have been communicated in different forms by the cross, e.g. a figurative iconographic depiction might have been created to educate a Christian parable, but the crosses location within the community might have a different and unrelated role. The capacity of the crosses to communicate more than one type of message will be discussed later in this study. Additionally, while we might have had functional roles they are also to be considered as active participants in the material culture of the time. Their role in society, as shall be developed, might be defined by how they interact with different parts of society rather than just being a transmitter of verbal meanings. As with all symbols, they gain their meaning not from themselves but in their relationships with other symbols, uses and associations within discourse.

functions varies between crosses and regions, which indicate to some extent the independence of their creators, but this renews questions about what was guiding the consistency in their form.

Since the High Crosses signify a medium choice and represent a considerable investment for the early church and their patrons, evaluating them against the competitive context of other public media of the time sheds new light on their usage and importance. It can be demonstrated that while clearly differentiated from other standing stones, on morphological and symbolic grounds, they appear to share many of the functions of both non-Christian and freestanding Christian stones. There are also functions in comparison that the High Crosses are not used for that are illuminating. Therefore, while they do not represent a physical evolution directly from cross-slabs they might be considered an evolution in terms of functional uses. A clearer understanding of the relationship between these classes of artefacts will facilitate for a better understanding of the impetus behind the creation and usage of the High Cross and their continued development.

HIGH CROSS AS MEDIUM: A COMMUNICATION MODEL

This study seeks to change perspectives on how the Irish High Crosses are viewed by examining them as an integral part of the evolving communications media array that was employed by the early Irish church. The communication innovations implemented by the early church can be demonstrated to be as much a revolution, from an Irish perspective, as an orderly evolution. In terms of how this approach shall be structured in this study, will be to investigate the High Crosses as medium against a communications model. The aim of this is to present a holistic view of the High Crosses from a communications systems perspective; and in order to accomplish this, it is useful to briefly examine the strengths and weaknesses of different communication system models that might be adapted for this study. Historically, the analysis of the crosses has focused around simplistic models of sender / message / receiver or in this case Church / Christianity / Christians. In order to gain a deeper appreciation of the motivations for why the High Crosses were built, a more complex communications systems model needs to be adopted. However, it has to be recognised that the type of model adopted has implications and limitations in terms of what information is presented and analysed. The following section briefly outlines the rationale for the adoption of a specific communications model for this study.

Shannon and Weaver (1949) introduced a highly influential and widely used *transmission model* that followed a linear or chain process to describe the communications process⁷. This model consists

⁷ This model was created to assist in the construction of a mathematical theory of communication – developed to assist their work in radio and telephone – and reflects the physical manifestation of a wire signal rather than the nature of mental communication covered in this research.

of a source / message / transmitter / signal / channel / receiver / message / destination⁸. However, this model has several limitations that have been identified by subsequent developments in this field. From a meaning or semiotic perspective it fails to account for the motivations of both the sender (creator) to create the message and the receiver (reader)⁹. Additionally, it does not account for other factors that have a bearing on the motivations of creator and reader in terms of the context of communication: social, political, cultural or religious factors all might have an impact on the communication process (Watson and Hill 1989: 149).

The transmission model also gives an unbalanced impression of communication as being segmented and unilateral rather than a composite event of many different contributing elements. A problem with this is it implies that the receiver in any communication is a passive participant¹⁰. The focuses of more recent studies have been to see any communication process as more interactive and circular in nature (Nöth 1990: 176)¹¹. Another limitation of the linear model is that it has been criticised for not placing the correct emphasis on the encoding and decoding of the message (Hall 1980: 129) which is not always a uniform process as is implied in the transmitter model. The ability of the reader to decode the message is not always equal to the way it was encoded. Therefore, receiving information does not necessarily imply comprehension. This disparity between the abilities of creator and reader can affect the communications ability to create a 'meaningful discourse' (Hall 1980: 130).

Subsequent developments in communication and information theory have introduced other key concepts not featured in the Shannon and Weaver model. There has been a redefinition of the concept of the channel as the medium¹². Another important development has been the concept of 'feedback', which represents the sender's monitoring, and adaptation of his or her own

⁸ In this transmitter model the source decides which message to send/produce; the transmitter encodes the message into a signal; the channel represents how the signal is transmitted; the receiver decodes the message from the signal; the destination where the message arrives. A sixth element *noise* is attached to the signal to introduce the possibility of interference in the reception and decoding of the message, such as bad lines, background noise while talking on a phone. In the case of the crosses, this could be weathering of the panels, bad lighting or even the viewer's eyesight. From a semiotic perspective, Sebeok (1985: 452) identifies 'noise' as 'differences between input and output...which can, however, be counteracted by 'redundancy'. *Redundancy* is 'a property assigned to a source by virtue of an excess of rules whereby it becomes increasingly likely that mistakes in repetition will be minimised'.

⁹ However, Sebeok (1985) does use a similar transmission model to identify the role of semiotic processes within a communication system.

¹⁰ Fiske (1982: 7) cautions that in this regard it is possible that Shannon and Weavers model makes communication appear as manipulation or propaganda.

¹¹ Nöth (1990: 174) also notes that from a semiotic perspective, this communication model does not illustrate the transmission of signs (mental concept) but of a signal (a physical one).

¹² 'The technical or physical means of converting the message into a signal capable of being transmitted along the channel' (Fiske 1982: 18). This combines aspects of Shannon and Weaver's transmitter, channel and receiver (Nöth 1990:175).

message by observation of its effects on recipients' (Nöth 1990: 178)¹³. While there are limitations to the use of any communications model, they are useful and constructive in developing an understanding of a communications system (Hall 1980: 128)¹⁴. Alternative communications models and their development have been discussed in detail by Nöth (1990), Fiske (1982), Watson, and Hill (1989)¹⁵. Since the basis of this thesis is in part archaeological evidence, this supports a structural approach and any model adopted should reflect this. This suggests that a model that acknowledges some of the developments to the Shannon and Weaver model could be adapted to offer a framework for investigation of the High Crosses and allow for more flexibility where information areas might be incomplete than a model that structures communications as a composite event¹⁶.

This study shall proceed on an adapted linear model along the lines of Shannon and Weaver's¹⁷. This model is illustrated in Figure 253. This brief overview of these different models for exploring the anatomy of communication systems raises some of the key areas that are investigated in this study to explore why High Crosses were developed. In order to understand the role of the High Crosses within the communication system it is important to understand: the nature of their production; their characteristics as a medium and how it evolved, including the context that we find them. With this in mind, a communication system model for the High Cross could be described as following: the information source as creator (s) who express a message¹⁸; which is encoded to a visual channel using sculpture as a 'representational media'

¹³ Also discussed by Fiske (1982: 21), as an important factor to be considered and accounted for in any communication model.

¹⁴ '...it is also possible (and useful) to think of this process in terms of a structure produced and sustained though the articulation of linked but distinct moments...This would be to think of the process as a 'complex structure in dominance' sustained through the articulation of connected practices, each of which, however, retains distinctiveness and has its own specific modality, its own forms and conditions of existence' (Hall 1980: 128).

¹⁵ Watson and Hill (1989: 45) explore twelve other prominent communications models in more detail. Another important model is that of Roman Jakobson (1960) whose model seeks to understand communication as a composite system and identifies the role of addresser and address in more detail. Advantages of this model are that it also recognizes the role of context and code in the communication process. This model has been adapted for other studies in the humanities from an implicit model of verbal communication. However, a limitation of Jakobson's methodology is that it does not account for the human within the communication process being as much a product of the language used, as they are the users of it as within that communication system. A more detailed exploration of this model can be found in Waugh (1985: 143-168) and Nöth (1990:185). Jakobson's recognition of the importance of context to a communication can also be found in other post-Shannon and Weaver models (Watson and Hill 1989: 14, 77, 113, 143, 147).

¹⁶ While this study will focus on one model, different models, with different emphasis, could provide different insights into the communication process.

¹⁷ It should be noted that it is the view of this thesis that the crosses were polysemic and the adoption of this model is to be reflective of the overall communication system of the crosses as a medium with an aim of simplification. By connecting the source to receiver in Shannon and Weaver's model a simple schema can be maintained that allows for audience 'feedback' to be accounted for.

¹⁸ An issue that will be explored more fully in the following chapters is the nature of the creator(s). The relationship between possible participants in the creative process of constructing the High Cross is unclear. This could have involved secular patrons actively involved in the design, different levels of coordination

(Fiske 1982: 18); this signal (physical form of the encoded message – aniconic or iconic representations) is then decoded¹⁹ by the reader. Another consideration is the compatibility of the codes used between creators and audience comprehension of both the new medium and the message needs to be investigated²⁰. The nature of the relationship between the creator and the audience and the independence of interpretation of the Christian message also needs to be explored. Related to this, what is the role of ‘feedback’ from the audience and what influence does this have in driving the evolution of the crosses? Finally, there is a need to establish an understanding of the context of both the creator and the audience – physically and mentally. This can be achieved by exploring areas of differentiation and complementarity between these groups. Since the crosses were possible tools for conversion we cannot assume that they could be initially read with competence. What is of interest to this study is that that it can be shown that the early church was adept at integrating and adopting local meanings and associations to reach new audiences. To what extent the early church adapted features of non-Christian communications systems are unknown. If the aim of communication is to create ‘meaningful discourse’ the focus of any discussion in this area has to recognise that any medium not only presents communication but also acts as an intermediary; actively maintaining relationships and interaction, in this case between the community comprised of secular and religious institutions and its audience.

As has been discussed there are limitations of adopting any communications systems model in establishing an understanding of the linear relationship of creator/cross (as medium)/ reader. Another important dimension is a vertical axis of the relationship of this cross to other standing

and participation from within the church, and similarly from the artists themselves. As shall be discussed, evidence from the crosses is not consistent with highly complex thematic decorations being found on some crosses and elementary errors occurring on other crosses. Reflecting on this model, they are closer to how modern advertising is constructed: a message is coded into pictures by a team, which is approved by a client and then exposed to an audience with a specific purpose in mind (Sonesson 1994:334). However, procedurally a creative process resulting in the production of a High Cross can be expected to be different. Wesley and MacLean’s (1957) mass communication model allows of an editorial function. However, the medium it attempts to model is more renewable than the crosses set in stone. Nadin (1990) has created models to describe the semiotics of any design process that accounts for the collaborative creative approach allowing reciprocal interaction to account for user ‘feedback’. The complexity and information requirements of his model make it unsuitable for this study.

¹⁹ Halls (1980: 131) view that this process is not always accomplished perfectly has already been discussed above. The model illustrates the transfer of information not comprehension (Shannon and Weaver 1949: 8). Additionally, Ang (1996) has challenged transmission models because they assume that a successful communication is normal in context where commonality of meaning cannot be taken for granted. It should also be noted that the High Crosses had different audiences, as shall be developed and allowing for different levels of interpretation could be possible. From a semiotic perspective, meaning is not the just found in the message but in the interpretation by the reader, which means that, the creator is not the sole creator of meaning. Chapter Six shall explore the concept of ‘aberrant decoding’ (Eco 1965: 105) to study the implications of problems caused by a less than perfect decoding and the implications this had for the early church in controlling their message.

²⁰ Additionally, this study will seek to identify possible ‘noise’ that might have affected this communication process.

stones and similar High Crosses. This 'intertextuality'²¹ between freestanding crosses has significant implications in terms of how they were read and used, especially considering the concept of 'feedback', when the model above is taken into consideration. This new axis involves changing the focus of the discussion of the crosses from the physical medium of communication to the more semiotic territory of how the messages meaning were coded and decoded. It is not unreasonable to assume that there were different levels of 'readers' who were capable of decoding the crosses at different levels of competence²². It is also likely that an audience familiar with non-Christian standing stones might carry over expectations of that media-type to the crosses. Raising the question of how the church was able to guide and control this decoding or interpretive process on a public medium²³. Part of this can be inferred from the frame of the message in the cross form, intertextual associations to other crosses and possibly adopting systems that guided both interpretation and as a result creation²⁴. This more semiotic line of enquiry will be explored in more depth in Chapter Six where the artefact as text (independent of author) shall be given greater consideration.

However, it must be recognised that there is a great deal of differentiation in the expression of cross forms: their scale and complexity of their morphology the most noticeable. This does not appear to detract from the observation that the message was framed by a prime Christian symbol. It is important to recognise that as McLuhan (1964) has pointed out that 'the medium is the message' and this means that in semiotic terms the 'text' is not neutral. In this case, not only has the medium become the message but also to some extent, they are interchangeable. What is read from the crosses would have been influenced by the medium. The cross form shows evidence of both consistencies and evidence of experimentation that reflect these considerations. Central symbolic elements of the cross appear to have remained central to the High Cross construction but their expression by the artists was individual. This means that while elements such as the

²¹ 'Intertextuality' is a term attributed to Julia Kristeva (1980), which describes the influence of the components of one *textual system* upon another, 'the transposition of one of more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative or denotative position' (Kristeva 1980: 15). Culler (1981: 114) clarifies the role of 'intertextuality' as having, 'a double focus. On the one hand, it calls our attention to the importance of prior texts, insisting that the autonomy of texts is a misleading notion and that work has the meaning it does only because certain things have previously been written. Yet in so far as it focuses on intelligibility, on meaning, 'intertextuality' leads us to consider prior texts as contributions to a code which makes possible the various effects of signification. Intertextuality thus becomes less a name for a work's relation to particular prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture: the relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture and its relation to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture'.

²² Schapiro (1963: 181; 1973:38) discusses the concepts of different audiences receiving different messages from the same piece of art in more detail.

²³ Since the crosses were a public medium it should be expected that meaning drawn from them might have a more collaborative takeout with insights and questions by other participants at a reading contributing to what was decoded.

²⁴ Eco (1976:134) introduces the concept of *overcoding* of messages to structure the interpretation of messages. Additionally, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) provide an extensive discussion of different 'compositional codes' that help guide interpretation within visual communications.

cross base, shaft and ringed-head remain consistent, how they look differs between crosses. What unites these elements has only been the discussion of relatively recent studies and many of these theories have not been challenged in-depth.

Part of the problem in any research on the Irish High Crosses is how to disambiguate and understand what unites all the different factors that appear to drive their development. Preceding studies have focused on the development of its form seeking to tackle the issue of its originality. However, it should be noted that while elements of the Irish High Cross were consistent there does not appear to have been any centralised coordination of their construction between regions. There was not a definitive model or template that was being followed. The development of the Irish High Crosses form appears to have been driven by different individuals or possibly workshops producing their own expressions of a shared mental concept in different regions and times, rather than attempting a faithful facsimile of a known artefact. In contrast to this, the use of iconographic panels, and the themes depicted, remains relatively constant. This thesis will attempt to explain what was uniting these three independent developments: of the medium, its signals and the comprehension of its messages.

This concludes the overview of the key areas and questions that this thesis shall explore. The structure of this discussion, predicated on the modified transmission model, is detailed in the following section of this introduction. This is followed, in Chapter One, by an overview of Ireland at the time of the High Crosses development and a historical review of studies on High Crosses.

THESIS OVERVIEW

This study is arranged in six parts: the first part, Chapter One, introduces Ireland at this time and presents a historical review of studies into the High Crosses. Chapter Two investigates scholarly discussion of the construction of the High Crosses and its symbolism. The subsequent chapters attempt to investigate the High Crosses from the perspective of the communications systems model detailed above. The second part, Chapters Three and Four, explores both the creators and patrons who were collectively the authors of the crosses. The third part, Chapter Five, investigates the High Cross as a medium choice or channel for communication and the context we find them. The fourth part, Chapters Six and Seven, explores the nature and needs of the audience of the crosses and the impact this had on the development of this medium. The final section, Chapter Eight, concludes this study by investigating what unites all of these separate factors resulting in the High Cross tradition – why they were built.

Chapter One: Early Christian Ireland

This chapter outlines the social, cultural, religious and economic changes that were occurring in Ireland at this time. It also provides a brief introduction and definition of the High Cross in relation to other standing stones. The second part of this chapter provides an overview of the history of scholarly research into the High Crosses.

Chapter Two: Form and Symbolism

This chapter will review and discuss scholarly research on the origins and evolution of the High Cross morphology. This shall be from both developmental and symbolic perspectives. This discussion has been structured around the discreet morphological elements of the cross form since ultimately the symbolic focus of this study is more concerned about what unites the different functional aspects of the cross form. This facilitates a more detailed discussion of the entire corpus of High Crosses to be discussed. The first half of this chapter shall focus on the structural distinctiveness of the crosses and their development. The second part of this chapter focuses on the possible symbolic influences or models for their 'original' form. This will involve reevaluating current thinking and associations of meanings with the cross-in-circle motif within the broader Christian context. Additionally, this will seek to differentiate the development of the High Cross tradition from other standing stones and establish a context for re-evaluating the influence of eastern sources on their development; in particular the adoption of prime Christian symbolism of the Holy Sepulchre.

Chapter Three: The Construction of the High Cross: Forms and Techniques

In order to establish a better understanding of why the High Cross was chosen over other forms of public monuments this chapter investigates the High Crosses in terms of structural and technical developments. Technical limitations inherent with this choice of medium will also be explored. The relative roles of the artist, directors and patrons of the construction process will also be examined in order to determine the relationship of message selection, expression and medium choice. This will assist in understanding the nature of the message transmitted, limitations of the medium and how this was communicated.

Chapter Four: Context of High Cross Construction

This section seeks to broaden on the understanding of what messages the High Cross were expected to be able to deliver. The previous chapter indicated that the artist might not be integrally involved in the message selection. With this in mind, this section seeks to describe the pre-Christian belief system and the barriers and opportunities that the early Church faced in communicating its teachings. It is also important to establish an understanding of how the impact of non-Christian associations with standing stones changed the expression of what and how the Christian message was altered in terms of Cross construction.

Central to understanding the environment and factors that led to the creation of the High Crosses is understanding the nature of the early Christian church and how this was different from other Christian traditions – in particular the unique Irish monastic expression. The impact of changes in settlements, population densities and resulting social and economic concentrations can be demonstrated to be related to cross development.

Chapter Five: Crosses and Orientation

The focus of this chapter is to investigate the medium choice of the High Cross form as public monument. Why the specific morphology of the ringed cross was chosen over other forms of public monument. This will involve developing an understanding of the usage of cross-slabs and other freestanding stones in comparison to where we find High Crosses. The primary use of non-Christian and Christian standing stones relate to human orientation on the landscape. The High Cross symbolism, locations and iconography will be examined from the perspective of this relationship of this orientation system and its representations. Furthermore, the complementarity of the non-Christian Irish orientation symbolism and primary Christian symbolism and practices will be explored in depth.

Chapter Six: How the Crosses were Read: Layout and Interpretation

Whereas the previous two chapters focused on factors that effected medium choice, the following two chapters focus on how the medium and the expression of the messages tailored for local audiences. The following chapter seeks to identify and explore what considerations were involved with tailoring how an Irish audience read the message. A significant challenge for the early church in Ireland was how to communicate to a largely non-literate oral society. This discussion highlights the function of the High Cross evolution as a message vehicle rather than having a solely aesthetic function. The main innovation of the introduction of the panel to guide the communication process - by separating narratives through frames – can be demonstrated to be tailored for the needs of an oral audience.

Chapter Seven: What was being Read? The Nature of Communication

This chapter explores the form of the message that was being communicated on the High Crosses and how this can be differentiated from other Christian cultures. This shall involve establishing an understanding of the Churches approach to communication in Ireland. In particular, the role of the written word in teaching the Christian message to the broader public. Additionally, the development of visual medium in terms of iconography and the role of the clergy in developing this shall be explored. This shall establish the likelihood of the High Crosses functioning as an educational intermediary between the preceding oral traditions and a religion of (foreign) words.

Chapter Eight: The Eastern Aspiration

The previous chapters have explored the nature of the authors, the medium and the audience of the High Crosses. The concluding chapter seeks to explain why the High Crosses were built not just in terms of the message that the church was trying to communicate or the needs of the audience but why we find this particular expression of Cross form. An alternative explanation for the adoption of the ringed cross form by reevaluating its symbolism based on the different considerations covered in this study will be forwarded. The answer for why the High Crosses were built can be found in the Irish expression of primary Christian symbolism from the east.

Epilogue

The epilogue will review the findings of this thesis from the perspective the finished discussion.

Supplementary Research

In the process of formulating and researching this thesis, a database was created as a starting point for understanding the diversity and decoration of the Irish High Crosses. This database while fundamental to the learning process is not central to the discussion presented here. Some of these findings have been appended to this document for use in related and future research.

Initially the focus of this database was the result of a broader area of investigation, aimed at investigating the existence of non-Christian or 'pagan' figurative art in Ireland in the early medieval period. The approach was to see standing stones in the early Christian period as a neutral medium - a billboard – for potentially Christian and non-Christian messages. A database was created using the photographic survey by Harbison– not actual observations of the High Crosses. The 237 crosses were coded by morphology and the 1568 panels that make up the collective corpus of High Cross decorations were analysed. This was not intended to replicate Harbison's study of the Christian iconography but to catalogue the non-iconographic features. It involved looking at a diverse range of preternatural creatures and anthropomorphic figures that are generally omitted from Harbison's discussion, which shall be investigated from the perspective of this thesis in future research. Additional detail of this data collection process is provided in the Appendix.

This process caused a redefinition of the focus of this study to the High Crosses and the purpose of their figurative ornament. A more detailed investigation of the High Cross as a neutral 'bill board' proved that the symbolic anatomy and context of the crosses plays a vital role in their purpose and interpretation. This investigation led to a change in perceptions from seeing them as passive artefacts to active evolving participants in early Irish material culture. Where meaning resides in how they were decoded rather than solely in the intentions of their authors. A more promising line of enquiry for this study was the division of secular and spiritual messages on the crosses and the role the cross itself had in the transmission of those messages.

CHAPTER ONE: EARLY CHRISTIAN IRELAND

Before commencing an analysis and discussion of this thesis, it is useful to present a brief outline of the historical, geographic, cultural, social and religious context that the High Crosses were developed in. Broadly, this study focuses on the introduction of Christianity into Irish society during the late Iron Age/early Christian period, from the fourth century through to the tenth century A.D. It is primarily concerned with how the Irish church tailored its material messages and teachings to the indigenous Irish audience. Specifically, the role of the Irish High Cross as a tailored medium development aimed at the Irish people.

The introduction of Christianity had a more profound effect on Ireland than just a change of belief systems. It was accompanied by cultural, economic, social and political changes. During the pre-Christian period, there is little evidence of towns or villages. Cultural development appears static until the ninth century when Christianity was firmly entrenched as the dominant cultural and social force¹. With the expansion of Christianity, there were changes in technology, notably agricultural techniques (Mitchell 1976: 166-171; de Paor 1993: 24) and literacy (Holländer 1974: 3; Stevenson 1989)². The island also shows evidence of expanded trade and contact with other cultures, notably from the east³. By the end of the ninth century, society had changed from a society based on kinship to a system based around a social hierarchy⁴. This resulted in a corresponding change from consumption of goods defined by symmetrical kinship relations, to a system where the goods go to a dominant centre (Graham 1993a: 21).

The introduction of Christianity, directly or indirectly, sees the increased urbanisation of Ireland from the fifth to the ninth century. The most significant development was the spread of large monastic centres. The population is believed to have lived in ring forts (*ráths*) of which up to 30,000 have been located (Mitchell 1976: 167; Richter 1988: 22; Swan 1988: 3). Estimates of

¹ Irish society before the seventh-century has been described as being in a state of flux with rapid changes taking place (Warner 1988) but with no major cultural developments.

² It is likely that some elements of Irish society were familiar with literacy before the introduction of Christianity. Stevenson (1989:168) has suggested that Latin was in use in Ireland as early as the fourth century. However, this would have been limited to the Irish 'intelligentsia' and those involved in mercantile trades. She also suggests a vernacular lay literacy was in use as early as the seventh century. It is important to keep in mind that this does not suggest the mainstream use of the technology of the word and Ireland at this time remained an essentially oral tradition. Urbanisation has been seen as providing the incentive for record keeping and a change from an oral culture to a written one (Ong 1982: 86). So this development while coinciding with the advent of Christianity might not be the only driver of its adoption.

³ Evidence of this contact shall be discussed in detail in the final chapter of this study.

⁴ The advent of Christianity also marks a move away from tribal conceptions of the social hierarchy of the divinity of kings to a more secular definition of kingship (Warner 1988: 57). Understanding this change and the role of the church in driving this secular change is important in understanding the context that High Crosses were built in as shall be discussed.

between 200,000 and 500,000 people were living on the island at this time (de Paor 1993: 23)⁵. The distribution of the main sites can be compared in Maps 1, 2 and 3, Maps 4, 5, 6 and 7 outlines the physical features of Ireland.

Culturally, Ireland unlike its neighbour island Britain, had escaped direct occupation by the Romans. This created unique issues for the Christian religion whose experience was in converting societies of Roman traditions. We have little surviving evidence of the pre-Christian belief system in Ireland (Ó Cróinín 1995: 30-31). The early monastic Christians, who captured this history from their own perspective, recorded much of what we do know. However, the clerics are not thought to have employed 'excessive censorship' (Hickey 1976: 33).

Christian communities are believed to have been established in Ireland in the early fifth century, possibly as early as the end of the fourth century (Edwards 1990: 99; De Paor 1993: 38)⁶. It has been suggested that Christianity reached the south coast of Munster as a result of Irish contact with the Roman coast of Britain (de Paor 1993: 35) which resulted in the interaction of peoples and beliefs⁷. We also know that the Church in Rome, under Pope Celestine, felt that the timing was appropriate to send the missionary Palladius to Ireland in AD 431 to help in the conversion of the local peoples (Ó Cróinín 1985: 17-18; de Paor 1993: 72-87). Other major early Christian centres were established in the following century. Patrick is believed to have arrived around 460 A.D, a generation after Palladius (Bourke 1993: 8)⁸. Columba arrived in Iona in AD 563 (RCAHMS 1982: 12) and Ciarán founded Clonmacnois in AD 547 (Hicks 1980: 6). Irish monasteries are thought to have been established as early as the sixth century (Edwards 1990: 19; Hurley 1982: 298-299; Cuppage 1986:25). This followed a monastic movement that was spreading across the continent; this originated amongst the eastern desert fathers and moved westwards through the Mediterranean. The monastery at Lérins is believed to have been very influential in the development of monasticism and its transmission and dissemination⁹. The first

⁵ Alternatively, Ó Corráin (1989:21) has estimated a variable population between half-a-million and a million people depending on factors such as famine and plague.

⁶ Awareness of Christianity, exposure and practice are problematic to differentiate. A discussion that will be explored in Chapter Six is that *ogam* – an Irish script – indicates an awareness of Latin in its development. This development has been dated as early as the beginning of the fourth century (McManus 1991) and the implications are clear in that Latin was the language of the Christian church.

⁷ *Ogam* evidence has linked the Munster *Déisi* to the *Déisi* in South-west Wales by the end to fourth century A.D. (Richards 1960: 135; Thomas 1994a). Thomas (1994a:4) has also controversially suggested that by the fourth and fifth centuries that Wales were both Christian and '*romanitas*' and that Irish settlers as a result of the raids and trade to Wales adopted these cultural, social and religious practices.

⁸ Dumville presents a more detailed discussion of this revision of chronology from 432 A.D. (1993: 39-43); he also discussed the impact and influence of the cult of Patrick on later perceptions of Palladius (1993: 65-84).

⁹ Bowen (1972: 31) has suggested that Monasticism was 'carried across the seas from South-west Wales supported by evidence of ceramic links between Ireland, Western Britain and Gaul'. Details of interaction between these regions based on ceramic evidence is detailed in Bowen (1972: 33-36) and Edwards (1990: 68-72)

monasteries are found distributed in a wide band east-west through the middle of the island, commonly on the province boundaries (Richter 1988: 50-51). The nature of the early Irish church is analysed in more detail in Chapter Four.

THE HIGH CROSS TRADITION

Irish High Crosses belong to a broader generic group of freestanding stones found within the insular regions. The High Cross is distinguished from other freestanding stones by having an architectural form with: a base, a shaft, a ringed head that might be either a perforated or a solid one-piece ring (Fig. 1). This distinctive design is located in Christian contexts corresponding roughly with the distribution of monasteries (Flower 1954: 87-88).

The largest proportions of freestanding stones are the cross-slabs, of which there are two main types: the upright-slab (Figs 2 & 3) and the recumbent-slab (Figs 4 & 5). Characteristically cross-slabs were rectangular and rough-cut. Their ornament tends to be incised rather than relief-carved. No definitive survey has yet been completed on these monuments, other than that of Lionard (1960). The earliest cross-slabs appeared around the sixth century (Lionard 1960: 108-109; 156). They continue with declining usage through to the twelfth century, though Ó Floinn (1994: 257) believes that production continued through to the thirteenth century.

The site at Clonmacnois has the largest number of surviving cross-slabs in the insular region, with several hundred stones in evidence today (Lionard 1960: 96); and believed to have had an active production between c.700-c.1200 (Edwards 1984: 57). The second largest site is the collection of stones at the monastery of Iona (Fisher 1994: 41) where there are about 100 carved stones dating to the eighth-century¹⁰. Iona's production levels would thus be similar to other sites such as Inis Cealtra, Co. Clare, Glendalough, Co. Wicklow and other totally excavated sites, Gallen, Co. Offaly, and St Berriherth's Kyle, Co. Tipperary (RCAHMS 1982: 14).

The appearance of the slabs appears to vary more with individual sites than over time (Lionard 1960: 96). Many were decorated with crosses, a design that was particularly popular within the early Christian artistic vocabulary. Some have incised designs of ringed crosses, the importance of which will be discussed later. As Henry (1965: 118) stated, 'the shape of the cross itself participates in this more organised design . . . gradually the cross with which it is engraved or carved seems to dictate the actual shape of the monument' (Figs 6, 7, 8, 9). This development might have been the impetus behind the desire to build the Irish High Crosses.

¹⁰ Fisher (1994: 41) estimates this as a quarter of the west Scottish total.

Notably, cross-slab production did not end when High Crosses construction commenced and both were apparently produced concurrently on many sites. High Crosses and slabs were probably first produced at the same time, midway through the seventh century (Richter 1988: 93). Henry (1965) identified two main groups of upright cross-slabs, those with incised ornament such as the cross-slab at Kilnassagart, Co. Armagh and the second group consisting of low relief carvings¹¹. Towards the end of the seventh century, cross-slabs became more monumental which suggests that the shape had become as important as their decoration (Henry 1965: 117). This might reflect the increasing demands of the Christian belief system and represents the changing role of stone monuments at this time. Another consideration is that the technology of the masons and their tools were also evolving.

The High Crosses are morphologically complex, distinguished by a change to a more plastic style of decoration and adoption of architectural techniques (Fig. 1). The Irish High Cross has a developed - usually pyramidal - base; a shaft; and a ringed crosshead. The term *High Cross* was first used in the *Annals of the Four Masters*¹². The High Cross appears to have developed independently from the comparative cultural traditions within the insular region. English crosses, while roughly contemporary (Henry 1965:132), differ in decoration, having vegetable scrolls with or without animals in the foliage while Irish crosses have spirals, interlace and angular patterns. The origins of the High Cross tradition will be discussed in more detail in following chapters but many scholars believe that foreign cultures, in particular the east, were influential (Harbison 1992: 329; Henry 1940: 117, 132)¹³. On the evidence available, the first freestanding stone crosses were

¹¹ The most commonly cited examples of the second group are the slabs of Drumhallagh, Cardonagh and Fahan Mura all in county Donegal. Each of these upright slabs is decorated on both sides (Henry 1965: 123-126; Richter 1988: 93). Henry (1951: 69) attributed this change in decoration to the influence of Coptic sources on the Carndonagh slab while Richter (1988) has found similarities with the design of the Book of Durrow. Henry (1965: 127-128) has dated the Fahan Mura slab to the second half of the seventh century, because of the similarity of the broad double interlace with the *Book of Durrow* (Figs 10 & 11). Nordenfalk (1947: 170) agrees with this dating. Contrary to this Laing & Laing (1993: 128) have found similarities between the Fahan Mura and Carndonagh slabs and the Scottish slab at Migvie, Aberdeenshire, based on the treatment of the interlace patterns. They suggest that a date of the ninth century, rather than the seventh century, would be more appropriate date for the Migvie slab; and consequently the Fahan Mura slab. Alternatively, Stevenson (1956: 96; 1985: 92-95) has found parallels between the treatment of the 'elongated oval form' of the armpits at Fahan Mura and the Cross at Cargave, Yorks, and proposes a Viking period date for the slab. Edwards (1985: 396) supports Henderson (1967: 132) because of similarities to Class-two Pictish slabs that it can be dated to the first half of the eighth century. Harbison has (1986: 60-61) argued on stylistic grounds that the Fahan Mura slab was constructed much later than AD 800, placing it after the first High Crosses. While the exact chronology of the slab is unclear, a date at least from the first half of the eighth century is likely.

¹² Historically the term High Cross was first used in the *Annals of the Four Masters*. Under the year AD 957 it states: 'The Termon of Ciarain was burned this year, from the High Cross to the *Sinainn*, both corn and mills' (trans. O'Donovan 1851: Vol. II: 677). A caution about this reference is that the work was compiled from earlier sources in the 17th Century. Additionally, Kelly (1986: 55) has warned that it is sometimes misleading to call the crosses 'high' because the majority are of a moderate height (see Data 103).

¹³ Henry thought that: 'The origins of the Irish High Cross are probably complex and multiple, and this is why an outside influence is less evident on them than in the case of English crosses and has been less often suggested. This is also the reason that explains the great variety of appearance of the Irish crosses of the eighth and beginning of the ninth centuries' (1965: 134).

developed over 50 years, from the middle of the eighth century. The more intensely decorated and developed crosses, e.g. the 'scriptural' class of crosses would date from between the mid-ninth to the early tenth centuries.

CONCLUSION

The Irish High Crosses were part of a broader tradition in Ireland of erecting standing stones. The three main groups of standing stones were the recumbent cross-slabs, upright cross-slabs and High Crosses. While their development commences with the introduction of Christianity, there were pre-Christian traditions of erecting stone monuments.

The broader tradition of erecting freestanding crosses has been connected to the patronage of local dynasties at the larger monastic sites. The cross-slabs appear in wider use and contexts. The use and evolution of standing stones in Ireland appears to follow the pattern of developing social, political, economic and religious factors. In terms of establishing a chronology for the High Crosses, those with complex figurative ornament are assumed older than those limited to aniconic decoration. However, there is little direct evidence with which to date the crosses¹⁴. The use of a perforated ring is perceived as a more mature art and reflects the use of better quality stone. However, the distinctive form of the Irish High Cross is still an enigma. Possible reasons for the development of this form shall be discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁴ Epigraphic evidence from the few inscriptions found on High Crosses have been correlated to kings names in the Annals (Harbison 1999), which shall be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

LITERATURE SURVEY

There are two main areas of research into Irish High Crosses that are relevant to this thesis: studies that focus on investigating their origins and those that discuss possible models for their construction. This section will provide a brief review the historical progression of research on the Irish High Crosses in order to place these themes and their discussion within a scholarly context. Chapter Two will investigate and discuss the most relevant studies to this thesis in more detail.

Historical Overview

The first scholarly studies of the High Crosses were written towards the end of the nineteenth century. The more notable studies were those completed by Petrie (1845) and Stokes (1894) who identified the location of certain crosses and provided the initial translations of their inscriptions. They also provided some of the first iconographic interpretations of the figurative decorations. These studies and many subsequent ones were limited by their access to an accurate record of High Cross numbers and detailed depictions of the crosses and associated standing stones.

Romilly Allen (1903) was one of the first to attempt to identify a more regional foundation for the presence and development of standing stones in an investigation of Scottish stones. His work also provided key insights into the iconography and geometric decorations on these crosses. Amongst his conclusions were that the Irish Crosses were later in development than the English or Scottish examples, a view that Collingwood (1926) supported. Collingwood (1927) later produced the most detailed survey of early British crosses until the 'Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England' (Vol.1 Cramp 1984 & Vol.2 Bailey and Cramp 1988)

The next major contributions to the study of High Crosses were the surveys completed by Henry Crawford. In a series of papers for the JRSAI (1907, 1908, 1918, 1927) he started the first descriptive lists that combined to create the most complete database of the High Crosses until recent times. His publication of *Irish Carved Ornament* (1926), with its retouched photographs and scene identifications, was a major contribution to the broader study of the iconography of the High Crosses. Kingsley Porter (1931) produced the next notable survey of the High Crosses, which also focused on their figurative sculpture. His work sought to place the Irish sculptural traditions within a broader continental context as well as illuminating shared iconographic themes.

Francoise Henry had arguably the most profound impact on the study of the Irish High Crosses and Irish art with the publication of several works (1933, 1940, 1964, 1965, 1967). Her early works provided for the first time a detailed analysis of the crosses, their decoration, usage and chronology. Henry was also able to place their development within an Irish context and to demonstrate their relationships with other arts and media of the time. The importance and impact of Henry's views will be discussed in more detail below. Around the same time period Sexton (1946) produced a useful summary of studies on Irish figure sculpture of this period.

Helen Roe (1945, 1960, 1965) advanced the discussion of the origins of the 'unique' ringed head form by investigating the Christian symbolism behind the device. She was also amongst the first to focus on the symbolism of other elements of the High Cross form, in addition to the ringed head. Her conclusions that the High Cross form can be directly linked to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem has influenced many subsequent studies into the origins, popularity and usage of the device. Roe provided two detailed studies on the crosses of Ossory (1962) and Kells (1959).

The role of Iona in the creation of the Irish High Crosses was investigated and refined by Stevenson (1956). He expanded the discussion of the relationship and development of the cross-slabs and High Crosses. In the process, he challenged some of the chronology that Henry had established for Irish Crosses. Harbison (1979) has also challenged the chronology established by Henry by reinterpreting some of the inscriptions upon which her dates rest. I shall discuss this debate over the chronology of the crosses below. Additionally, Stevenson provided and expanded on the reconstruction of the St John's cross, Iona by Macalister (1928). Robertson (1975) investigated the construction and decorative techniques used at Iona in detail. He expanded on our understanding of the relationships of wooden and stone cross forms and with the decorative techniques used on other media of the time. The similarity between the carved ornament of Ireland, Iona and Pictland has been explored and verified by Henderson (1982, 1986, 1987 & 1993). The development and role of the crosses at Iona were revisited by the detailed publication of the RCAHMS (1982). These reconstructions at Iona are fundamental to our understanding of the evolution of the High Cross form and its variations.

There are also important studies into concurrent freestanding stone traditions published at this time. Lionard (1960) significantly expanded upon the study of recumbent and upright cross-slabs. He provided a detailed study of their provenance, decoration, inscriptions and chronology¹⁵. A later study of the County Galway cross-slabs by Higgins (1987) focusing on the ornamental decoration and inscriptions of standing stones in this region has contributed

¹⁵ Swift (1994) has effectively challenged Lionard's reliance on the Annals for his chronology. A more detailed discussion of epigraphic evidence found on the crosses is conducted in Chapter Seven.

significantly to the understanding of cross-slab content and regional differences in their use. The role and development of the cross-slabs was explored further by Hamlin (1982b), who linked the content of their decoration with their context, in particular exploring the use and significance of *ogam* and *chi-rho* symbols incised on standing stones from within a Christian context. The correlation between inscribed crosses and *ogam* on standing stones in Ireland and Britain has also been explored by Charles Thomas (1971, 1973a, 1973b, 1987, 1994a) who came to a different conclusion believing *ogam* are found in primarily pagan contexts. McManus (1991) has completed an extensive study of the *ogam* script and their use on standing stones. He provides a useful synthesis of preceding views on their role and a compelling explanation of the scripts origins and usage in an Irish Christian context. The production of cross-slabs in the largest workshop at Clonmacnois has been discussed by Hicks (1980) and directly connected with specific Connacht kings by their decoration and form (Ó Floinn 1994).

Nancy Edwards (1983) completed a comprehensive study of the distinctive Ahenny and Kilkieran Crosses, Ossory that encompassed a discussion of their decoration, construction and the techniques that might have been employed. She also provided a detailed analysis of their iconography and suggested a possible chronology for the crosses. In a later study on the origins of freestanding stone crosses in Ireland, Edwards (1985) provides a useful summary and analysis of the cross-slab and High Cross traditions and their relationships. This also includes an explanation of the development of the freestanding crosses in Ireland from wooden crosses to sculptural forms. She was able to establish the High Crosses as a local Irish development that initially employed outside techniques in their construction. Edwards also conditionally supported Roe's (1965) associations of the High Cross form with eastern models and Henry's (1965) associations of cross-slab forms with Coptic grave-slab shapes. The implications of the nature of the eastern connection shall be discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter.

While the majority of scholarly attention has been focused on the more 'interesting' perforated crosses, Kelly (1986) has comprehensively investigated the role and description of solid ringed crosses. She introduced the first statistical breakdown of these less decorated crosses and made key distinctions between the distributions and relationships of solid and perforated forms of High Crosses. Her later (1991) study of possible models for the High Cross form offered insights into the prototypes of High Crosses and their construction. She was able to convincingly identify four possible wooden prototypes and their skeuomorphic features present on stone versions. However, her conclusions regarding the symbolic inspirations for these models are debated in this thesis. Kelly continued her exploration of the construction of the High Crosses in 1996 with a study of the metrical and design characteristics of some Columban High Crosses. Amongst other findings, this has shed light into the use of geometry in their

design. Her conclusions and connections to techniques used in the construction of Gospel pages concur with other studies into the decoration techniques in Irish Art (Gelly 1994; Ryan 1994, Stevick 1994 & 1991, Robertson 1975)

Some of the preceding scholars have noted the possibility of eastern influences in the development of the High Cross form and decoration of Irish standing stones. Richardson has extensively explored the links between the cross form, biblical symbolism and early eastern Christian architecture in a series of articles. Her first published study (1984a) investigated the concept of the High Cross and its likely origins. Building on Roe's (1945) identification of the Holy Sepulcher as a likely model, Richardson developed a credible interpretation of the capstones of some High Crosses as being the *Anastasis* itself. She was also amongst the first to explore these eastern connections in any detail, presenting a persuasive connection between the artistic traditions of Ireland, Georgia and Armenia during this time. This theme of study was further explored in two further articles in 1987 and 1994. However, as will be discussed below, there are factors not considered in Richardson's conclusions that might necessitate a reconsideration of the way these influences manifested themselves in early Christian Irish art. In 1990, with Scarry, she produced an evidential survey documenting for the first time four faces of the more decorative crosses. This addressed the limitations of earlier works that tended to illustrate only the east and west faces of crosses. The work also offered a synthesis of the iconographic themes of these crosses. However, this work has been overshadowed by Peter Harbison's *The High Crosses of Ireland: An Iconographic and Photographic Survey* (1992).

Harbison's survey for the first time presents a comprehensive photographic survey of the decorative High Crosses accompanied with an iconographic interpretation of the figurative scenes. The photographic survey makes available detailed photography of all decorated sides of 237 crosses and fragments. This survey is limited in that it omits some undecorated crosses, crosses that are not of a certain height and bases without crosses are not identified. The merits of the iconographic survey are best reviewed on a panel-by-panel basis but Harbison provides a detailed summary of previous scholarly identification before asserting his own views. Other implications of this work will be covered in the proceeding literature survey.

There have been many other specific studies into regional groups of Crosses that have contributed to the understanding of the High Crosses. The Ossory group (Roe 1962; Edwards 1983), the Clonmacnois Crosses (Hicks 1980), the Tihilly Crosses (de Paor 1987), the Blackwater Crosses (Hamlin 1994). Hamlin (1987b) also provided the most comprehensive survey of the mention of crosses from primary literary sources. Outside of Ireland, notable studies into standing stones have been completed at Iona (RCAHMS 1982), on Anglo-Saxon sculpture and

standing stones (Cramp 1984), on early Christian stones at Wales (Nash Williams 1950). Archaeological surveys of County Down (HMSO 1966), the Dingle Peninsula (1986), County Louth (Buckley & Sweetman 1991) and the Iveragh Peninsula (O'Sullivan & Sheehan 1996) have all be useful in investigating the context of crosses for this study. There have also been wide varieties of smaller papers that have contributed to this corpus of knowledge on High Crosses detailed in the bibliography.

CHAPTER TWO: FORM AND SYMBOLISM

It is the purpose of this chapter to explore the evolution of the High Cross form from two main perspectives: the structural evolution of its form and the development of and incorporation of its symbolism. There have been a series of key studies of the both the cross-slabs and High Crosses that investigate different aspects of their development. The following section will provide a review of the most relevant studies to the investigation of this thesis.

There are three main areas of scholarly research concerned with the genesis and evolution of the High Cross morphology: a possible preceding wooden tradition, the effect this had on their translation into stone and the development of the High Crosses as an independent tradition. All of these factors can be shown to have been influenced by symbolic considerations - as well as structural - especially once they appear as a more established and independent tradition.

OVERVIEW

Much of the research of the High Crosses has been limited by access to accurate numbers, detailed descriptions and depictions. Stokes' 1894 (1894: 1) survey identified only 45 Irish High Crosses. Crawford (1907, 1908, 1918) conducted the most comprehensive survey after this, accounting for 270 crosses; these lists do include some later examples. Henry (1964: 13) started to construct a chronology in her survey: identifying 60 or 70 crosses that belonged to the pre-Romanesque period (before the twelfth-century). She suspected there might have been around 300 crosses including fragments (1964: 13-14) and speculates that 'once several thousands are likely to have existed'¹. Kelly in her survey of cross morphology agrees with Henry's figure of around 300 extant crosses (1986: 54). Richardson & Scarry (1990: 12) were more conservative than this enumerating 'just under three hundred crosses or the remains of crosses, and many of these are plain without a ring'. Peter Harbison (1992) has completed the most comprehensive survey and major contribution to the Irish High Crosses to date, with a corpus of some 237 crosses and fragments. This survey is limited by the parameters of Harbison's primary focus - on iconography. Undecorated crosses below his cut-off height are not covered unless they are over 1.50m in height. The survey also does not cover bases that do not have shafts or heads.

¹ This figure is hard to substantiate with the current records; however, a comprehensive survey of cross bases without crosses remains uncompleted, which would give a better indication of total numbers.

The morphology of the crosses and their decoration in terms of subject matter and expertise in execution is highly differentiated from site to site. When looking at their form High Crosses appear to vary as much spatially as chronologically. They are found in clusters and are in some cases assumed products from the same workshop. Solid-ringed High Crosses, rather than those with perforated heads, represent the largest proportion of surviving crosses: each type is found in distinctly different areas (Kelly 1986: 57). (Compare Data 5-10)

Richardson & Scarry (1990: 17-18) have suggested a plausible rough chronology for the High Crosses in four stages. The first stage is the Ahenny or Ossory group of crosses with largely geometric ornament. The second stage of development is seen as a transitional one where scenes that are more biblical (iconic) are incorporated into the decoration, e.g. South Cross, Clonmacnois and Cross of Patrick and Columba, Kells. The third stage is the apex of High Cross decoration that is the group of 30 Scripture Crosses. The final phase of crosses is later, dating to the eleventh and first half of the twelfth century. (Illustrated in Fig. 12) This correlation of figurative decoration (and technical ability) over time also marks a corresponding evolution of the symbolism of the cross form.

In order to understand the development of the High Cross symbolism it is important to be aware of what marks the evolution of the cross form. While there are common morphological features across the corpus of crosses, even when looking at the most developed forms of these crosses, there is a notable differentiation in their construction. Since this study seeks to identify the extent and nature of eastern influences – morphologically and symbolically – on the High Crosses a modular approach has been taken to this discussion of their form. This will facilitate a clear comparison with various eastern traditions and the more accurate isolation of symbolic elements and themes. The first part of this chapter will discuss the development of the cross form in the context of wood, metal and stone. The second part of this chapter will focus on the symbolism that is associated with the different cross forms and their structural elements found in Ireland at this time.

THE IRISH HIGH CROSS: FROM WOOD TO STONE

A primary concern of this study is the development of the stone Irish High Cross medium; however, there is evidence of a preceding, possibly concurrent, wooden tradition². Evidence for wooden crosses on a monumental scale, in both Britain and Ireland, is derived from two written sources:

² There was also likely to have been wooden antecedents for other 'standing stones': the recumbent and upright cross-slabs which will not be discussed in detail in this study. Wooden and stone monuments may have coexisted over the creation-span of the High Crosses (Harbison 1988: 158-160).

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* & Adomnán's *Life of Colmcille*. Bede tells of the raising of a wooden cross by Oswald at Heavenfield in A.D. 633:

The place is still shown today and is held in great veneration where Oswald, when he was about to engage in battle, set up the sign of the holy cross and on bended knees, prayed to God to send heavenly aid to His worshippers in their dire need. In fact it is related that when a cross had been hastily made and the hole dug in which it was to stand, he seized the cross himself in the ardour of his faith, placed it in the hole, and held it upright with both hands until the soldiers had heaped up the earth and fixed it in position (HE III.2, trans. Colgrave & Mynors 1969: 214-215).

In erecting a cross, it is not clear whether Oswald started this tradition or if he was following an Irish practice. It is possible that Oswald had been to Iona and seen the wooden crosses erected there (Edwards 1985: 399). Higgitt (1986 : 142) is in agreement with this view and suggests the influence of the Irish church, making the point that Oswald had been exiled in Ireland so he might have been following Irish examples of worship. Furthermore, Rollason (1989: 26) believes this influence of the Irish church was more established, claiming that Oswald had converted to Christianity while in Ireland and his erecting of a cross might indicate a continuation of an Irish tradition³. An additional account of a wooden cross is documents by Adomnán: 'In that place a cross that was later fixed in a mill-stone is seen, standing by a roadside, even today' (trans. Anderson and Anderson 1961: 522-23). The cross that was fixed into the millstone is generally accepted as wooden (Kelly 1991: 105). It is also possible that this tradition of wooden crosses was inspired by other traditions from the east⁴.

It has been suggested that smaller wooden crosses were used as templates on later slabs, from which designs were incised (Ó Ríordáin 1947b: 111-112, Lionard 1960: 139). These have been inferred either from points at the ends of shafts (Fig. 35a) or from pommel-like endings (Fig. 35b). The pointed crosses would have been erected to mark or commemorate events and the pommel-like shafts might have been processional or pectoral crosses carried in a holster, e.g. as it shown in a later scene in Fig. 36. On the north side of the base of the North Cross, Ahenny there is a figure that appears to carrying a ringed cross in a procession (Hickey 1955, PL XXIV, 3).

³ There are similarities that can be drawn between this account of Oswald's erection of the cross symbol and the vision of a cross symbol by Constantine, both to win battles and establish Christianity. This will be discussed in more detail later in this study. However, this suggests in emulating a pivotal Christian moment that either Oswald – possibly Bede – were evoking parallels of this kind. If the historical account were correct then Oswald would have been exposed and aware of Christian history and the significance of the ritual.

⁴ Adomnán records, in *De Locis Sanctis*, the marking of the location, on the river Jordan, where Christ was baptised by John with a wooden cross (Meehan 1983: 86-87). The eastern connection will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Archaeological evidence of this wooden tradition is limited. There may have been an established timber tradition that was a precursor to stone pillars in Ireland (Edwards 1985: 399; Waddell 1982: 26; Kelly 1991: 106). Kelly (1991: 120) has suggested that Iona could have played a significant role in the dissemination of the concept of the freestanding cross in wooden form. However, we know that Iona's local wood supplies were depleted by the sixth century from pollen analysis. It is a doubtful that there was enough wood left over from the construction of dwellings. However, timber had been brought over 75km from the mainland since the late seventh century (Fisher 1994: 35). These supplies might have been sufficient for crosses⁵.

The shift from wood to stone could have happened for any of a number of reasons. It could have been a response to continental trends. Kitzinger (1940: 37) has proposed, in the seventh century churches adopted the 'southern manner' and that this led to monumental stone works⁶. Working in stone would have given permanence to the church that may not have been apparent before. This view is supported by Thomas (1973b: 15), who claims that stone crosses replaced the wooden ones when ecclesiastical architecture shifted from timber to stone. It seems that there was a conscious decision by the church to build in stone. It is also possible that there were symbolic associations - both non-Christian⁷ and Christian⁸ - that were driving this change. However, there is no reason to discount a view that a tradition of wooden crosses may have continued concurrently with stone crosses. It is unlikely these wooden markers would have survived to this day (Mytum 1992: 97). The stone bases without surviving crosses might be evidence of this: wooden crosses could have been placed in the empty sockets.

Iona is a possible place of origin for the Irish High Cross tradition (Stevenson 1956: 85-86; De Paor 1987: 149; Laing & Laing 1993: 148). It has fourteen surviving freestanding stone crosses and eight cross bases and shafts (RCAHMS 1982: 14, Nos. 80-93). The origin of the ringed head and its incorporation into a monumental stone cross design at Iona has been discussed from different

⁵ Quality wood was also rare in Ireland with evidence that law protected trees as early as the seventh century (Binchy 1971: 156-159; Mitchell 1976: 177; Kelly 1986: 108-109). Sacred trees are given special status in the *Ancient Laws of Ireland* (1895: 477).

⁶ The *Council of Epaona* in AD 517 (Lionard 1961: 136) forbade the consecrations of wooden altars, which led to altars being developed in stone.

⁷ Stones had pre-Christian associations: tied into Irish pre-Christian rituals, such as the standing stone *Lia Fáil* at Tara (Davidson 1992: 28; Tilley 1996: 174; Ó Ríordáin 1957: 15 PL; Eliade 1958, 1959), which is discussed in more detail below.

⁸ In the Bible: 1Pe: 2:5: 'Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ'. The Messiah is also referred to as stone in several passages (Ps. 118: 22; Isa.28:16; Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11). The metaphoric relationship between the church and rock is also found in Mt: 16:18: 'And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'. The very presence of monumental structures in stone would have changed the socio-cultural associations and perceptions of the material format.

perspectives. Stevenson (1956: 89) believed that the ring could have evolved in Pictland under the influence of Hiberno-Saxon culture, particularly Northumbrian. He points out that the arms of the St John's cross (Figs 13, 14) are concave and not parallel and suggests that this is fairly direct imitation of the normal North British crosshead e.g. the Ruthwell cross, c.700 AD. However, it should be noted that if a Northumbrian artist traveled to Iona the work is not an imitation but original work under new direction. The Northumbrian experimentation resulted, at least by the second half of the eighth century, in carved decorated slabs with ringed cross in relief, e.g. the slabs at Glamis and Aberlemno (Figs 17, 18). Stevenson has drawn parallels between the treatment of the armpits on these relief slabs and the freestanding Iona's St Oran's High Cross (Fig. 16). In relation, it has been suggested that freestanding stones were pioneered at the Columban foundations at both Kells and Iona during the late eighth and early ninth century (Hamlin 1994: 193). The earliest crosses at Iona were the St John's (Fig. 13), St Martin's (Figs 19, 20) and St Oran's (Fig. 16) (Laing & Laing 1993: 148). Furthermore, Laing & Laing (1993: 151) believe that all three crosses show affinities to two experimental crosses at Ahenny, Co. Tipperary.

The RCAHMS survey, on the Iona settlement (1982: 16), endorses a connection between Pictish art and the decoration of Iona crosses. However, the High Crosses at Iona do not have the panels, which are differentiating characteristics of the Irish High Crosses. Harbison (1992: 325) has pointed out that the iconographic decoration of the Iona crosses are not coherently arranged, as one would have expected if they were to be the examples for the Irish crosses. He also believes that, 'the flatter style of carving on St Martins cross is more likely to have been adapted from, rather than led up to, the high relief sculpture of the Kells crosses which is probably closer in style to the original models on which sculpture is based'. However, the skills necessary to construct a High Cross and those necessary to decorate it, might not have been invested in the one sculptor. Kelly (1993b), in an investigation of the morphology and ornament of the Crosses of Argyll, believes that the western Scottish and Iona crosses are closer to the Irish constructions than Northumbrian or Anglo-Saxon freestanding crosses are. She suggests (1993b: 227; Fig. 27.10), 'it seems appropriate, therefore, to envisage an enlarged province, comprising Ireland and the south-west of Scotland'⁹. Considering the correlations in design between these crosses, it is likely that Kelly is correct in grouping these regions; however, there is still considerable differentiation in their construction, which will be discussed below.

⁹ Nieke and Dunkan (1988:6) support this perspective of viewing Ireland and Northern Britain as one district.

SKEUOMORPHS: INFLUENCE OF CARPENTRY MODELS

Many connections have been made between the features of the early stone crosses and their early wooden models. The earliest crosses at Iona appear to have clear connections to wooden predecessors¹⁰. The freestanding crosses were a new tradition of stone monument borrowing more from architectural construction than from the slabs that accompanied them on the landscape. The crosses were constructed from stone pieces, usually from local stone. On some of the larger crosses, we find the composition divided into three or more pieces. Crosses constructed from more than one piece of stone were joined together by mortise and tenon joints. There is some debate on the change and evolution of these techniques. This distinction is important in the way that we analyse the decoration of the crosses and their purpose.

There is general agreement that the main evidence of wood working techniques migrating to stone is the use of the mortise and tenon joint, which is likely to have been adapted from carpentry (Kelly 1991: 120-121; Stalley 1996: 11). Tenons facilitated an expansion in the dimensions of the crosses as taller crosses often utilised an additional piece of stone. There has been a supposition that the St Martins cross at Iona (Figs 19, 20) might have had wooden extensions on its arms (Stevenson 1956: 86) but stone arms could have been damaged or relocated, or that the cross might have had a design flaw in its transom. The use of tenons is particularly evident in the construction other Iona crosses (Figs 15, 23, 24) (Stevenson 1956: 87, Fig. 1; Robertson 1975: 115).

Kelly (1991) has convincingly argued that stone crosses were skeuomorphs¹¹ of their wooden predecessors, with several elements of carpentry being retained in the stone versions. This view has been supported by Hamlin (1994: 187), who reported that on the Tynan Village Cross from the Blackwater Group, the arm of a cross appears chamfered into a chisel shape, a technique clearly borrowed from carpentry. Additionally, Harbison (1992: 345) believes the Toureen Peakaun Cross, Cashel Cross and Drumcliff Cross all demonstrate influences from carpentry prototypes¹².

¹⁰ Some cross-slabs are also thought to have had wooden predecessors, e.g. the cross-slabs indicated by Ó Ríordáin (1947a: 108) and at Iona (Stevenson 1956: 86) and a tall slab at Caher Island (Herity 1995: 127).

¹¹ Richardson defines this term: 'skeuomorph is normally the result of obsolescence. A feature remains frozen in its original form when it has lost its meaning and applies to a set of circumstances that are no longer relevant' (1994: 177).

¹² The retention of woodworking techniques in stone was not restricted to the High Crosses. Early stone buildings show similar characteristics (Raleigh Radford 1977: 3; Ó Ríordáin 1947b: 110). Harbison suggested that the stone Gallarus oratory (Fig. 37) was a stone version of a wooden beehive hut (1970: 49). The change to stone buildings occurred at the same time of the Viking incursions, perhaps because they were more resistant to raids, but Raleigh Radford (1977: 4) points out that that stone and wooden churches were built next to each other. It is likely then, as with the High Crosses, that the medium of masonry borrowed some characteristics of carpentry. However, stone churches were not standard until the eleventh century (Harbison

The RCAHMS (1982: 17) survey of Iona differs on the level of dependence on wooden 'prototypes', in discussing the St John's cross. It states that the St John's cross has, 'a composite ring based on the familiar techniques of carpentry, but not imitating an actual wooden cross'. Another consideration here is the modular nature of Irish High Crosses; this means that crosses, that were either damaged or moved around, are now found as hybrids, e.g. Tuam Cross, Co. Galway, Clogher Cross, Co. Tyrone and Clones Cross, Co. Monaghan (Stalley 1996: 7). (Data 20 summarises that state of the crosses detailed in the IHCPs). In some crosses, it is not known whether mortise and tenons were used (Mc Guire and Clark 1987: 44).

An innovative attempt to identify the predecessors and extent of influence of these wooden crosses on stone crosses has been made by Dorothy Kelly (1991) in a key study on the morphology of early Irish crosses. Kelly (1991: 107-127) convincingly argues for four distinct preceding wooden crosses that sculptors borrowed from in order to construct the stone crosses. These skeuomorphic groups are shown in the following diagrams: Group 1 (Figs 25, 26), Group 2 (Figs 27, 28), Group 3 (Figs 29, 30), Group 4 (Fig. 31). The most striking group she has identified is Group 4, which accounts for the more developed form of the Ahenny (ringed) crosses:

In the interpretation of these crosses which recognises them as skeuomorphs of wooden plank-built crosses with three upright elements to their structures, this may be explained as a functional feature, a method of securing the outer element to the central section of the original, perhaps by the means of a rivet or bolt driven through the projecting wooden tongue (Kelly 1991: 116) (see Figs 33, 34).

The distribution of these four types is illustrated in Map 8. As part of this construction Kelly (1991: 129) believes that the capstones played an important part in the transfer from a wooden prototype consisting of three vertical planks bolted together (represented by bosses). The capstones would have kept these together at the top supporting the boss rivets. Furthermore the 'the use of a solid block of wood, particularly roof-or-house-shaped, at the top of a plank-built structure would have two advantages, providing run-off of rain and covering the raw edges of the plank at that point'. The broader implications and possible meanings of the capstone will be discussed in more detail below. While Kelly's models are convincing some of her conclusions regarding the symbolism of the High Crosses and motivations for their construction, are challenged in the second part of this chapter.

1970: 49) and Harbison suggests that in the case of the Gallarus oratory it is a later development, as does Fanning (1981: 150-151).

SKEUOMORPHS: EVIDENCE OF METAL MODELS

There is also some consensus that features and techniques of metalwork were carried over to the some stone Cross versions. However, instead of being modelled on larger wooden crosses, the influence was likely to have been from smaller portable metal varieties. Henry (1933: 164-165) was amongst the first to establish that the Irish Crosses were based on metal prototypes. She later (1965: 140-141) compared Irish metalwork with the Ossory and Clonmacnois High Crosses, which she saw as, 'processional crosses or reliquary crosses turned into stone monuments' (1940: 134)¹³. This feature of the High Crosses has been taken up and developed by other scholars. Robertson (1975: 115-116) in analysing the St John's Cross, Iona, has been able to convincingly identify a circular pattern also found on Irish Crosses. He believes that this reflects a wood worker's technique being carved in true relief. This can be compared to the Ahenny Crosses where the more incised execution of the same pattern reflects metalwork techniques (see Fig. 41). There is some consensus that the influence of metalwork includes sheet-metal covered wooden crosses: suggesting some crosses were covered with bronze sheets etched with figures and designs and fastened to the wood with studs (Ó Ríordáin 1947b: 112-113; Harbison 1977: 283; Scherman 1981: 316, Richardson 1984a: 129; 1994: 177-178; de Paor 1987: 149. It is also possible to find the influence of metalwork on cross-slabs¹⁴. Edwards (1985: 401), from her detailed study of the Ossory crosses, agrees with Henry about the Ahenny crosses and says they 'have the striking appearance of being metalwork crosses carved in stone', but she cautions that 'there are no definite early examples of metal work crosses until the Cross of Cong c. 1233' (Fig. 43). However, Harbison (1992: 346) has plausibly compared the eighth-century Rupertus cross from Bischofshofen, Austria, a wooden cross with applied gilt copper decoration (Fig. 42), to the panels on the South Cross at Ahenny, where the eastern face has bosses he believes these were modelled on glass or enameled studs (Fig. 38).

Kelly (1991: 131) has expanded on the possible sources of influential metalwork, comparing the construction of reliquary boxes to the bosses and panels on the High Crosses. Reliquary crosses

¹³ Ó Ríordáin (1947b: 109-111) endorsed this view, finding similarities between the Ossory crosses and chip-carving metalwork techniques of the eighth-century and believes the High Crosses were also influenced by wooden traditions.

¹⁴ Higgins (1987: 67) identified slab number 84, from Co. Galway as a skeuomorph of a metal cross with ornamental bosses. Other examples of metalwork being transferal to stone can be found on the South face of the North pillar, Co. Donegal. Here 'three conjoined peltae', with a boss in the intervening triangles, are thought to be an imitation of metalwork (Fig. 54b) (Harbison 1986: 55, pl 4.6b). The decorated stones from Glencolumbkille that mark pilgrim stations might also be imitations of metalwork (Harbison 1986: 66). It would appear that any of the larger collections of stone slabs have a representative sample that draws upon metalwork for inspiration.

were also decorated with small rivet heads that served ornamental and structural roles¹⁵. This transfer of designs and techniques was not limited to stonework. During the eighth and ninth centuries, there is evidence for some cross-fertilisation between stone sculpture, manuscript illumination and metalwork (Whitfield 1994: 89). Manuscript decoration in the monasteries appears to have borrowed from the developed secular metalwork that would have been given as gifts from patrons (Stevenson 1982: 94). Ryan (1992: 137) has claimed that the interlace animals in the *Book of Kells* are comparable to the Derrynaflan chalice. This in turn was 'similar in spirit' to the Pictish slabs of the eighth and ninth centuries, e.g. Papil cross slab, Aberlemno and Dunfallandy (Front Face). However, Harbison does caution that while animal ornament was likely to be copied from bronze¹⁶, there are few examples of figure sculptures in bronze.

ARTISTIC EXPRESSION: FROM SKEUOMORPHIC BOLTS TO THE BOSS STYLE

While the fastening of metal panels onto wood with nails or rivets appears to have been translated into stone, bosses may also owe some of their popularity to their role in the construction of wooden High Crosses, discussed above. The large bosses often have the appearance of bolts that go through the stone crosses. Both of these borrowed elements of material construction were quickly assimilated into an evolving art style – the boss-style. The boss-style is an important indicator of the artistic relationships within the region. Henry (1940: 148-9) identified examples of a 'boss style' from Scotland on the tomb of St Andrews, the Tall Cross slab at Nigg and the Aberlemno slab (Angus)¹⁷. She dates these to the eighth century, based on stylistic similarities to the *Book of Kells* (Henry 1940: 148-9)¹⁸.

The 'boss style' is defined by plastic or geometric bosses that were more ornamental than functional. Stevenson thought that 'the growth of a roundel into a boss, under the inspiration of metal-work, would have been natural when local sculpture was taking a more plastic form' (1956: 90). The Dalriadic 'boss style' of the crosses at Iona has parallels to the treatment of bosses on the Ahenny crosses (Stevenson 1956: 91-92). He (1956: 89-91) views the 'birds nest bosses' at Iona as unique to

¹⁵ The dependence on metalwork was also noted by Harbison (1992: 347) on the ends of the North and Tall High crosses at Monasterboice (Harbison 1992, Fig. 996), the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnois (Harbison 1992, Fig. 137) and the Durrow Cross (Harbison 1992, Fig. 252).

¹⁶ Henry (1957: 152) was able to identify one example from Templemanaghan, Dingle Peninsula. In describing the stone from the gable of the oratory, Henry believes that this worn animal head shares characteristics with eighth-century metalwork animals.

¹⁷ Laing & Laing (1993: 134) include standing stones from St. Vigean, Angus, Meigle & Perthshire slabs in this category.

¹⁸ Henderson (1993) believes that these crosses have been seen to have been influenced in their design by contemporary metal work.

that region and suggests that the St Johns' cross bosses show experimentation with the boss form. He attributed the origins of the 'boss and snake' motif to Pictland.

Bosses appear to initially have had a decorative nature that developed into a more plastic form of decoration. However, not all decorative bosses appear to have been carved as part of the cross. Certain crosses have circular recesses that are assumed to have been designed to facilitate large metal bosses as part of the overall decoration (Robertson 1975; RCAHMS 1982: 203; Kelly 1986: 60). An example of this is the west face of the St Oran's cross, Iona (RCAHMS 1982 Fig. 6, 82A). While there is some uncertainty as to how these bosses would be fixed to the crosses, a suggestion has been made by Robertson, regarding the central boss of the St John's Cross, Iona:

'There is no doubt that is an indent for holding another ornamental feature such as a projecting boss. For this purpose, however, an inset of bronze rather than stone would be more efficient, and a well defined groove on the inner edge of the recess supports this suggestion. This metal disc would be carefully made to drop neatly into the recess, then, by lightly hammering its convex surface, the base would expand and lock tightly behind the undercut edge of the recess. In effect the complete roundel, with its decorative border and bronze centre-piece, must have resembled a great circular brooch' (Robertson 1975: 116).

(Fig. 49)

Additionally, Hamlin (1994: 193) has contributed to this view in her study on the Blackwater Group identifying the possibility that wooden bosses with interlace decoration were applied to the crosses to cover these holes, as on the one surviving from tenth-century Dublin (Fig. 50) (Wallace 1982: 123; Lang 1988, PL 1 DW1). Some possible metal bosses have also been identified by Wamers (1983: 279-284, Fig. 1a, 5, 7). He believes that some insular metalwork, discovered in Norwegian Viking graves, that have been identified as bowls or bases of chalices, might be metal bosses: 'the design and construction could be taken to suggest that the bowl was mounted on a hemispherical base perhaps on the top or front of a wooden cross'.

Furthermore, on a smaller scale, bosses functioned to cover up nail heads on metal and woodwork (Harbison 1977: 283). This would mean that the boss styles are copying decorative caps rather than nail heads and would help to explain the wide variations in 'nail-head' designs. Harbison (1986: 61) compares, late eighth-century and early ninth-century discs at the centre and interstices of the east face of the Fahan Mura slab, to the similar treatment in the design of the Ormside bowl (Fig. 46) to illustrate this – an Anglo-Saxon silver/copper bowl dated to the second half of the eighth century

(Webster and Backhouse 1991: 173, Fig. 134; Edwards 1983: 8)¹⁹. Small bosses or 'nail heads' appear on panels such as the base of the North Cross, Castledermot (Fig. 44, 45), which has spiral decorated panels, within which there are round, square and rectangular 'nail heads'²⁰ (Harbison 1992: 346)²¹.

In a useful summation of this artistic development, Edwards (1983: 9) has proposed an evolutionary plan, from nail heads to the domed bosses (Fig. 47). However, this (1983: 8) development plan might reflect the choice of the patrons and artists rather than the evolution of a style²². She correctly views the development of a 'boss style' in Insular art as an important link between the artistic traditions of the Ossory Crosses and insular art in general. The use of these 'nail heads' has been identified on the eighth-century crosses at Ahenny (Scherman 1981: 316) and on the Carndonagh cross (Harbison 1986: 50) and 'nail heads' can also be seen in the *Book of Kells* (F2v, F33r, Henry 1940: 14). This might suggest that, by the time of the Book's creation, they had taken on some meaning beyond that of a construction detail.

Another feature that might have been transferred from wooden crosses covered in metal panels are the pronounced 'double mouldings' that are found on the earlier Ahenny Crosses (Fig. 31, 55, 56). Initially, Henry (1965: 140) suggested they could represent coverings between the joints of sheets of bronze that covered a wooden cross. In her study of the Ossory crosses, Edwards (1983: 7-8) connected this with similar techniques used on the hatched-moulding on the Sutton Hoo hanging bowl; or to the cable hoops used on penannular brooches, e.g. the brooch from Ballinderry II, dated by Kilbride-Jones to AD 750-800 (1937: 443); or the filigree cables that are used to decorate the Ardagh chalice and Tara brooch (Henry 1965, Pl. 39-42). This transfer was supported by Kelly (1991: 128-129), in her analysis of High Cross morphology, who believes that they may represent the

¹⁹ Another consideration is that there are contemporary metal crosses in the East that have bosses, e.g. a bronze pectoral cross, from Egypt, fifth to sixth century (Fig. 90). These might have implications in terms of the origins of their techniques and symbolism, as shall be discussed.

²⁰ Additionally, the bosses on the west faces of both the South and North Crosses at Ahenny also appear to be based on bronze studs (Figs. 39, 40).

²¹ While considering the use of bosses as a more decorative function than structural there have been some suggestions that the primary purpose of the bosses was as a visual device to highlight the cross structure. An investigation of the decoration of the St Patrick's Bell has led Kilbride-Jones (1992: 303, 1990: 305-307) to propose that the artist placed a dot in the centre of each swastika in order to bring attention to it over the reserved cross pattern (Fig. 51, 52). This visual technique has also been identified on the *Book of Durrow* and the *Lindisfarne Gospels* (Stevenson 1982: 98). An inscribed cross-slab from Reask, Co Kerry (Fig. 53) (Fanning 1981: 142-143, Fig. 30d) has 'small dots placed in the angle of each cross arm' which might have been inscribed to bring attention to the inscribed cross. Kilbride-Jones states, 'the prime reason for utilising dots was as a centre mark. This was true in the case of the crossing of arms and shafts in High Crosses. A well-known example, dating to about AD 675, is that at Carndonagh, Co. Donegal' (1990: 305).

²² This stylistic development on formal grounds does not account for the possibility of evolving symbolic considerations as shall be discussed in the second half of this Chapter.

metal panels that covered a wooden cross as their 'ornamental edge-mouldings'. Harbison (1992: 348) has come to a similar conclusion in comparing the Ahenny double-moulding to the bronze beading of the Rupertus Cross (Fig. 42). He believes that the mouldings can also be seen on Muiredach's Cross, Monasterboice and on the north side of the Durrow Cross. This could mean that these mouldings were an innovation, inspired by examples. A novel view has been proposed by Richardson (1994: 105), who believed they served a practical purpose, to support panels of wood for decorative purposes; however, there is no evidence to support this supposition.

SKEUOMORPHS: KNOBS ON THE CROSS HEAD

Another possible feature of the transfer of metal working techniques is the appearance of rolls or knobs in the armpits of the Crosses. These knobs have received relatively little attention compared to other formal structural elements in scholarly discussion. These might serve a similar role to the boss depressions, 'to disguise the rivets by means of which the metal plates on each side of the cross held together' (Allen 1904: 190); but, instead of marking penetration panels, we find the knobs are located on the inner and outer rings. Significantly, those crosses that have bosses at the centre of a cross do not have them in the armpits (Power 1925: 57). Kelly (1986: 60-61) has suggested that the change from bosses to rolls on the ring might have been to facilitate the depiction of crucifixion scenes. The implications of this are that the design and message of the ornament has overtaken the need to conform to the sculptors' dependence on skeuomorphs. Additionally, this development might also reflect a regional approach²³. Crosses, with rolls on the ring, tend to be distributed more to the north east of Ireland (see Data 79-89). This suggests that either their usage reflects the choice of a group of sculptors or that this part of Ireland was exposed to a different cross models from the rest of Ireland.

Edwards (1985: 404), Richardson (1990: 12) and Harbison (1992: 344) are the only scholars that appear to have made the distinctions between rolls on the inner and outer ring. Harbison attributed this to a reflection of workshop preference. The rolls ultimately derive from

prototype crosses; the cylinders probably consisted of a bronze sheet nailed to the inner wooden core, then rolled up and provided with a decorative cup at the ends and soldered or otherwise attached to the bronze sheets on the two faces of the crosses, in order to prevent these detaching themselves from the faces.

²³ However, this feature of cross morphology was not limited to Ireland, there are similarities between the roll form of a Bronze Processional Cross, Constantinople, tenth century (Fig. 91) and those found on the Eassie Priory Stone, (Fig. 92)

Harbison's view is supported in that the use of bosses or rolls is not a mandatory part of a High Cross. We can also note that there are decorative variations of cylinders, e.g. creatures emerging from the cylinder ends on Drumcliffe Cross (Fig. 63)²⁴.

The problem with assuming that metalworking techniques that survive are 'frozen' does not allow for the possibility that they were purposely incorporated into the stone crosses from metalwork, because of their symbolic role and not a 'skeuomorphic' value. There are three main possibilities that are not necessarily discrete:

1. Techniques are in fact 'skeuomorphs', where a vestigial characteristic of carpentry is continued in stonework. Lionard (1960: 125) cites 'three Inis Cealtra slabs (Fig. 20; 4, 5), where the "ring" is formed of straight bars, the wooden prototype of which would have been attached to the cross by pegs'. This might have been more an attempt to mimic the early Roman and Coptic crosses decorated with wreaths (discussed in detail below) than a serious attempt at architectural innovation.
2. That the original objects act as prototypes or paradigms. Bosses might be copied because this takes on a new meaning or fulfill an ornamental role
3. That the characteristics are consciously reproduced to symbolise the original rather than being an object in their own right.

The role of artistic choice is a difficult area to address in the development of the crosses and the nature of this relationship will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter. Another consideration, is that while Kelly's (1991) models for the crosses are convincing, there is still a wide variety of differentiation amongst the corpus of High Crosses. Crossheads appear in two main forms: one-piece (solid) and perforated versions. In an earlier study, Kelly (1986: 63-66) produced an influential survey of cross morphology, indicating that the distribution of these types corresponds roughly with the types of stone that were available. She believes that the solid rings (one-third of the High Cross corpus) came from an earlier period of cross development. Perforated rings are located where there is better sandstone (see Map 9). This would have allowed sculptors the freedom to experiment and to refine elements such as the perforated ring. It also means that the symbolic

²⁴ There are also square forms of rolls. They are present on one High Cross, the Roscrea Cross, Co. Tipperary (Fig. 60) (Harbison 1992, Cat. 194 Figs. 543). We also find that many inscribed crosses on cross-slabs have square rolls. In the *Book of Durrow*, on the Four Evangelists symbols page, the bosses are square (Fig. 62) (Werner 1990: 177, fig2, fol2r) also on a fresco from Faras, Sudan (the ancient Pahoras) (Fig. 61) They are also found on inscribed crosses on cross-slabs (Fig. 57, 58, 59). Cross-slabs from St. Berriherth's Kyle, Co. Tipperary show inscribed crosses with square rolls in the armpits (Ó hÉailidhe 1967: 109, Fig 2 -7a, 7b; Fig 3 - 8a, 10, 9a, 9b, 13b). Since the shape of the rolls does not appear to have a structural role and the square form was known in Ireland this might have meant that the rounded form had a symbolic purpose, which shall be discussed later.

complexity of the crosses might have been facilitated by the evolution of the medium and construction techniques.

CAPSTONES

A prominent feature, exclusive to some of the more developed High Crosses, is the use of a capstone to crown the creation. An investigation of the capstones is important because they are a morphological feature that is unique to the High Crosses. They are not found on other freestanding crosses or in relation to other symbolic themes. The capstones found on certain crosses come in a variety of different forms. 23 High Crosses have separate capstones (Kelly 1991: 129). There are 18 illustrated in Harbison's survey (see Data 67-69). An additional nine crosses have tenons that might have been used to attach caps (see Data 75). There are three main types of capstones (Fig. 109): conical or domed, small roof and house-shaped. Separate capstones are found on the more ornate and developed Irish High Crosses. Later crosses tend to have the capstones and headpieces carved from a single piece of stone (Kelly 1991: 128). This might indicate that, as with the bosses, their function became more ornamental. It also indicates that they were considered a permanent part of the symbolic composite.

The size and removable nature of earlier domed capstones is attested by MacNamara (1899: 250-251)²⁵. Because of the removable nature of the capstones, their authenticity has been historically questioned. While Crawford (1909: 256) believed that they were part of the original construction, Roe (1962: 13) was more doubtful. Edwards (1983: 7) has reservations but suggests that the capstones were original, because there are no horizontal mouldings along the top of the upper cross arm on the narrow faces of the crosses. As a result, without the capstone, the cross would have had an unbalanced composition. Kelly (1985: 160-161) has pointed out that in 1839 the ordnance survey records their presence. She plausibly argues that because they add to 'general coherence of the monuments' they should be seen as original. A possible origin of the capstones has been suggested by Harbison (1991: 167), who believes that the detachable nature of the capstones was deliberate: 'the house-shaped top could conceivably have been a house-shaped reliquary containing a relic of the founding saint, which could have been detached from the cross and shown in public, or even brought on tour, as the occasion demanded. This feature would then have been copied on the stone cross where it would have made very little sense, though preserving for us the shapes of the house-

²⁵ MacNamara states, 'it was a common occurrence for persons suffering from headache, with the aid of a ladder to remove this stone, and put their heads for a short time in the hole for the purpose of being cured of the ailment' (1899: 250-251).

shaped shrines in wood and metal that have long since vanished'. While intriguing this view does not have any supportive evidence²⁶.

This structural element has been perceived as an integral part, with the iconographic decoration, of the crosses meaning. In discussing the South Cross at Monasterboice (Muiredach's Cross) (Fig. 113a), Ó Carragáin (1989: 22) has identified the capstone as a representation of a church. He sees its role as being central to uniting the iconographic theme of the whole cross: 'The panels on this house-cap exploit the symbolic dimensions of the concepts "church" ("ecclesia") and "temple" in patristic thought, to provide for a cross a "corner stone" uniting the separate programmes of its two broad sides'. If Ó Carragáin's view is to be accepted this might be an exception. Edwards (1985: 405), earlier differed from this assessment, as the top arm of the South Cross 'had been considerably shortened to ensure that the heavy capstone is secure'; but believes that, 'the ornament on the top cross arm is not linked to that on the capstone'. However, it is more likely that the capstone was part of a broader theme of morphological symbolism. The skill of the carver probably enabled him to take advantage of the extended canvas to 'unite' the iconography.

What structures the capstones were emulating is unclear. Edwards (1985: 406) has suggested that the roof capstone of the Clonmacnois South Cross (Fig. 12), could be a three-dimensional version of the roof-shaped top, to the upper cross arm on one side of the Fahan Mura Slab (Fig. 10). She places the Fahan Mura slab in the same tradition as the Pictish class II slabs: Glamis 2, Nigg and Aberlemno. These slabs do not show signs of attempting to copy architectural features very faithfully. The Fahan Mura slab is an unlikely model because, while it has a pointed apex, it has none of the functionality or dimensionality of the rooftop capstones. It is more likely that this is a separate tradition with a different source model²⁷. However, as stone churches only became common in the twelfth century (Harbison 1970: 48; Hamlin 1984: 119), a portable or local reliquary would provide a more likely model for the roof - capstones. Roof-like capstones have associated with familiar structures of the time such as a miniature church (Richardson 1994: 183) or a metal reliquary box (Fig. 110) (Kelly 1991: 131). It is possible that the form of continental European and possibly Coptic examples could

²⁶ There is also the possibility that there were capstone forms that we do not have evidence for, such as the capstone that would have fitted into the socket on the top arm of the small cross at Durrow (Henry 1963, Plate X). It is interesting to note that of the entire cross forms found on grave-slabs illustrated by Lionard (1961) none shows evidence of capstones. While there is evidence of the other elements of a High Cross: bosses, bases, perforated rings and armpit rolls. This might indicate that they were an Irish innovation particular to High Crosses and not dependent on models.

²⁷ The shape of the Fahan Mura slab appears to have more in common with Coptic relief slabs (see Fig. 111) (Badawy 1978: 210-211).

have influenced the development of the capstones²⁸. The integration of local relevance with these structures is discussed below.

CROSS MORPHOLOGY: DISCUSSION

A more detailed contextual investigation of the capstones in relation to other early Christian church-like structures can offer insights to the possible broader usage and meaning of the High Crosses. They are important because they differentiate the High Cross from other traditions of standing stones. O'Farrell (1984: 8-12) has suggested that a later High Cross, the Kilfenora 'Cross in the Field', Co. Clare (Fig. 124) is part of the larger tradition of 'celebrating' founders. His reconstruction (Fig. 125) of the High Cross incorporates a vertical backing for a roofed founder's tomb, which has a shape similar to a reliquary box. There are special founder tombs at Clones, Co. Monaghan, founded in the sixth century, and Killabuonia, Co. Kerry (Fig. 127) and Duleek, Co. Meath. There are continental examples present after AD 662. O'Farrell's proposition is compelling if his reconstruction of the Kilfenora cross is correct. This also provides a purpose for the capstones in line with Harbison's view (1991:167), that the pre-skeuomorphic capstones have a defined role in local ritual and are not just part of a symbolic theme.

In a related reconstruction, Herity (1987b: 141-143) shows a sketch of a tomb-shrine from Ardoileán, Co. Galway, dating to AD 635-725 (Fig. 126). Like O'Farrell's reconstruction, of 'the Cross in the Field' Kilfenora tomb-shrine, it has a standing stone as an integral part of its composition. This tomb-shrine has cross-slabs at either end, facing to the east. Herity (1993: 188-195) in this detailed discussion also suggests that there were other ways of representing a founder's tomb in Ireland, including:

1. *Ogam* stones and cross decorated pillars
2. Upright cross slabs
3. A-roofed tombs
4. Box shrine of decorated stones
5. Small rectangular buildings

²⁸ Badawy (1978: 210-211) reports burial practices in the east where models of houses were placed over Coptic and Syrian graves. He says that a 'classification [that] would include stelae with architectural motif, round-topped with architectural motif and eagle, elaborate flat patterns, wreathed cross, composite, cippus, altar slabs, and rectangular panels' would be part of this tradition, see Figs 111 and 112.

He suggests that the development of these traditions slowed with the production of metal shrines. He does note that Irish founder shrines are found commonly in open-air settings, outside of the main church, e.g. Fig. 128. Founder's tombs have been found all over Ireland (Herity 1993, Fig. 23.1). This may strengthen the case for contextually associating some crosses with founder's tombs.

The association of freestanding crosses and reliquaries can be illustrated through other examples. Henry (1957: 155) believes that the constant association of the oratory with a pillar or slab is significant, as in many places this seems to have marked a tomb or defined tombs, calling to mind *martyria*. The *martyria* were small funerary chapels erected over the tomb of a martyr with the altar above the tomb. A burial tradition similar to this is documented in Bede's description of the remains of St Chad, who was buried in 672 A.D. at Lichfield in Mercia. Of his place of burial, Bede states: 'Chad's place of burial is a wooden coffin in the shape of a little house, having an aperture in its side, through which those who visit it out of devotion can insert their hands and take out a little of the dust' (EH: iv. 3-4, trans. Colgrave and Mynors 1969: 347)²⁹.

Saints' bodies were first allowed to decompose, then collected and placed into smaller vessels for keeping, usually in reliquaries (Henry 1957: 160). This would make a fairly compelling case for the 'roof'-like capstones being representative of reliquaries, not directly representative of a church. It is important to differentiate whether the church capstones were copying a church or a reliquary based on a church. Considering the concept of the 'founders tomb' and the central role it played in early Christian settlements, (Henry 1957: 154-155; Bitel 1990: 57; Herity 1990: 97) it may be that these capstones directly represent reliquaries of local saints³⁰.

The form of these 'house shaped shrines' might have developed from a number of influences. Models would have been the shape of churches and the shapes of *sarcophagi* and tombs influenced by the shapes of Christian and non-Christian building traditions (Thomas 1971: 163). Karkov (1991: 33-34) supports this view, stating 'the shrines themselves are ultimately based on architectural models' but then states that 'the temple on 202v, the "Temptation" page, in the *Book of Kells* is identical in structure to the capstones of the scripture crosses', see Fig. 129. The architectural accuracy of the temple depiction, from the *Book of Kells*, has been challenged: 'the level of craftsmanship used in normal domestic building might, in general, be simpler; but the drawing of the

²⁹ Following this description O'Sullivan and Sheehan (1996: 248) have identified two of these 'gable shrines' on the Iveragh Peninsula, Killloluai (960) and Illaunloughan. Another possible example has been identified at Reask, Co. Kerry (Fanning 1981: 84-85, fig 7, Pl IIIb).

³⁰ This conclusion shall be contrasted to the view that the capstones represent part of the symbolic depiction of the Holy Sepulchre in the second part of this chapter.

Temple does not indicate the range and level of techniques which were available to carpenters of the period and which can be considered reconstructions based on the archaeological evidence' (Murray 1979: 94). However, in investigating the liturgical influences on the *Book of Kells*, Farr (1991: 133-135) believes the temple picture was an attempt to depict the Holy Sepulchre. She does not discount the possibility that it could be a depiction of a local church. However, considering that the temple drawing and the reliquary cross are so closely depicted and taking into consideration the regional use of house-shaped reliquaries (Fig. 110) and gable tombs (Fig. 114) this would tend to identify the capstones as representing reliquaries (modeled on churches) and not a direct copy of a church. The connection between the Holy Sepulchre and the early Christian period will be discussed in more detail below.

DOMED CAPSTONES

Within this discussion of 'church like' capstones it is still necessary to explain the tradition of domed capstones. Richardson (1984a: 130) recognised the similarity of these capstones to *clochán*³¹ but dismissed this. It is surprising that the connection between the *clochán* and the capstones has not been more frequently made. There would have also been a preceding (contemporary) wooden hut tradition at early settlements. That domed caps are found on Ahenny crosses might also tell us more about their purpose, for there is no literary or archaeological evidence of a monastery associated with these crosses (de Paor 1987: 150). This might mean that they were associated with a hermitage or pilgrimage station where one would expect to find a *clochán* and not a developed church to represent the founder³². Another consideration is the chronology of High Crosses compared to contemporary church structures. The Ahenny crosses are amongst the earlier crosses and the domed capstones might reflect 'churches' of the time, while the more developed reliquary capstones found on the tenth-century Scripture Crosses of Durrow, Clonmacnois and Monasterboice might reflect more advanced church architecture of that period. Alternatively, the material form of reliquaries at these wealthier centres.

The *clochán* shapes are referred to as beehive huts, such as either at Reask, Co. Kerry (Fanning 1981: 154) and Church Island (O'Kelly 1958, Fig. 4) or as boat-shaped like the Gallarus oratory on Dingle

³¹ The *clochán* of the type stone hut was often associated with early monasteries and hermitages (Laing & Laing 1993: 55; Harbison 1970: 34; Herity 1990: 68; Herity 1984: 106-107; Henry 1957: 46).

³² The decoration of the Ahenny crosses is also aniconic, which might mean, as discussed later, that they were from a Docetist tradition – where Christ's divine nature is emphasised over his corporeal. This might suggest that the focus of this religious community might have emphasised a less material existence. However, a consideration is that they are early crosses and as such do not generally show developed iconic representations.

Peninsula (Harbison 1970: 34; Adair 1978: 188). Both of these descriptions confirm that the huts were domed in construction. Oratories are significant as they are one of the structural elements associated with founder tombs. The distribution of the Gallarus-type oratories is illustrated in Map 10. Herity (1990: 68), in discussing the foundations of a hermitage on *Ardoileán*, Co. Galway, says that the abbot's cell was circular and domed. He believes that these habitations were like those of the Egyptian ascetics³³. Near the *Ardoileán* domed hut were 'several rude stone altars, or penitential stations, on which there are small stone crosses'. He (1990: 96) believes that the distinctive shape of the huts is the adaptation of a traditional round building to the new square form that was introduced with Christianity. This would imply that the domed shape would have had distinct significance to the clergy.

SHAFTS

The shafts that we find between the cross head and the bases are of varying heights and forms. They either were mainly parallel or tapered in or out from the base towards the head (see Data 56-66). In some cases the shaft was a solid piece with the base. On others, it is evident that a mortise and tenon were used to attach larger shafts and base (McGuire and Clark 1987: 44-45). These reflect a chronological development of aniconic to iconic decorations. The layout and decoration of the shafts is often a more distinctive feature than their morphology. A more detailed discussion of their layout will occur in the following chapters from different perspectives.

BASES

The other distinctive feature of the cross form is the base, which also can be inferred to have a symbolic role as well as being ballast for the cross. It has often been noted that the base size is disproportionate to the needs of counterbalancing the cross shaft and head. There are possible local variations on the use and intended meaning of the bases. Adomnán, in *Life of Columba* (trans. Anderson and Anderson 1961: 522-523), reports that Iona a cross was erected on a millstone which served as a base: 'a cross that was later fixed in a mill stone is seen, standing by the roadside, even today'. Cogitosus in his *Life of St Brigit* records the movement of a 'giant millstone' from a mountaintop to the plain below by invoking her name (trans. Connolly and Picard 1987: 24-25, LSB 31). This 'later rested at the door to the Cell Dara's inner enclosure, protecting the inner sanctum of the monastery. The stone remained untouched by a fire that damaged other monastic buildings. It

³³ The iconography of the Irish High Crosses and Irish monasticism show some influence from Egyptian monasticism as shall be discussed in more detail below.

also had the power to heal ailing pilgrims' (Bitel 1990: 65). This might have a special community message considering the importance of the millstone and its choice as a base³⁴.

Additionally, there is other evidence of rocks of secular significance used as the base for crosses. Lynch (1983: 16) believes that the St Patrick's Cross base, Co. Tipperary might be a recycled inauguration stone of the Kings of Munster. Leask (1951: 17) calls the base a 'pedestal' block because it is 4'9" (1.5 m) by 3'9" (1.2 m) and about 4' (1.2m) in height. A possibly related secular interpretation is that the stepped bases were appealing because they reflected the settlements within Ireland. Ring forts (*ráths*) often had a stepped appearance, built up by concentric walls (*vallums*). The base being the 'secular' part of the cross might have reflected this³⁵. Aitchison (1994: 239) in examining the Armagh Church suggests that multivallate hill forts and the ring fort tradition have been interpreted as the defended or fortified settlements of high status individuals³⁶. Considering the royal patronage of some crosses³⁷ and the relationship between the church and the aristocracy it is

³⁴ Millstones were one of the technological changes that Christianity, more specifically monasticism, brought with it. 'Monks, since they could not depend on abundant slave-labor, were also interested in labor-saving devices such as water-mills, known to, but little used by, the Romans' (Hillgarth 1986: 21). The vertical mills are thought to have been a later development. The early mills were likely to have been communally owned or a farmer rented time at one (Ó Cróinín 1995: 96-98). Mytum (1992: 198-199) suggests that free grades of society had shares of a mill to ensure their independence: 'The lower grades of unfree tenants were, even if they owned some land of their own, required to make use of a secular or monastic mill, no doubt at a considerable charge'. Supporting this identification of ownership, Cogitosus explains that the millstone of St. Brigit was able to tell the difference between the grain of a 'heathen and pagan and Christian grain by stopping all motion when in contact with 'druid's grain' (trans. Connolly and Picard 1987: 24-25, LSB 31: 8). . Another example on this role for mills comes from the *Life of St. Mochuda*, where Mochuda is protected by a ring of fire that won't let robbers into the mill (trans. Power 1914: 94-95). Restricted access to millstones is also recorded as law in the *Ancient Laws of Ireland* (1895: 475). This might indicate that access to mills was used to coerce farmers to convert to Christianity in order to access a mill. On a more spiritual level in the *Martyrology of Oengus* (Stokes 1905: 135) saints are likened to 'God's wheat' that is milled.

Power (1940) discusses the possible identification of the *Stowe Missal* pattern on a quern-stone. This is in the shape of a cross and would have been a clear indication of a Christian mill. Doherty (1985: 55) has identified that one of the advantages of monasticism was that it 'had established centres that exercised strong gravitational pull (by contrast kingship was peripatetic). It was in the position to exploit fully technical innovations such as the plough and horizontal watermill'. This enabled monasteries to produce a surplus and engage in trade. It is not surprising therefore for a monastery to use as the base of a cross as a symbolic secular message. Undoubtedly, there were some non-Christian symbolic associations with its role in agriculture that the church would have been content to assume, though it should be noted that an old millstone was a ready-made stand for a cross. A further connection between millstones and sacred stones can be found in the *Annals of the Four Kingdoms* (trans. O'Donovan 1854: 739), in the year 998, where it records that after a battle, 'the stone of *Lia Ailbhe* fell ... and four mill-stones were made of it by *Maelseachlainn* [the king]'.

³⁵ *Trivallate* ring forts have been linked to the social hierarchy, representing more established settlements (Warner 1988:50)

³⁶ Aitchison (1994: 239) believes that, 'a relationship may have existed, or been perceived to exist, between the scale and/or the impenetrability of the defenses and the status of the occupant, although these features may more accurately be said to reflect the possession of power rather than rank'.

³⁷ High Crosses at Durrow, Clonmacnois and Kinnity have all been linked to the Southern *Ui Néill* dynasty of *Clann Cholmáin* Kings from their inscriptions (Ó Floinn 1994: 923; Harbison 1999). Further connections between royalty and epigraphic evidence will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

not unreasonable to reason that the stepped bases could be viewed in this context, particularly since some of the cross bases were circular. The church also manifested this 'raising' of architecture in monastic designs, with oratories and annexes (slabs or tombs) generally found on a raised terrace (Henry 1957: 154).

There are possible symbolic explanations for the adoption and development of bases. Here we should consider the biblical cornerstone as a possible explanation for this development³⁸. Ladner (1983: 178) has identified Peter 1 2:5 and the idea of 'living stones' as one of the chief notions of medieval symbolism of church building. He believes that the cornerstone in medieval literature could be positioned at the top or bottom of a building and suggests that it comes in the form of a vault, pediment or even a pyramid (Ladner 1983: 181). Some connection might well have been made between the Irish High Cross bases and the cornerstone at a metaphoric level.

³⁸ Eph: 2:20: 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone' and 'Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1Pe: 2:5)'.

CROSS SYMBOLISM

SYMBOLIC CONSIDERATIONS: CROSS MORPHOLOGY AND THE RINGED CROSS

One of the earliest explanations for the presence of the capstones within the composite High Cross was forwarded by Roe (1965: 220-223), who attributed the ultimate origin of the house-shaped capstone to the form of Constantine's Church of the *Anastasis*: 'within which was the Holy Sepulchre, itself enshrined in a sort of little house (*aedicula*) of varicolored marbles and sheltered by an elaborate *ciborium* [canopy]; nearby, but let open to the sky was the Hill of Golgotha, surmounted by a great cross and approached by a flight of marble steps'. Roe believed that the entire cross form was an attempt to depict a symbolic representation of this *crux gemmata* - the Jewelled Cross³⁹. The capstones are an important differentiator of the High Cross tradition and central to understanding their symbolism. However, depictions of the *crux gemmata* were not restricted to High Crosses, as we find this motif on a wide variety of artefacts in different expressions. For example, Roe (1965: 222) has suggested that the decoration of a slab from Drumhallagh, Co. Donegal (Fig. 9) is a simplified version of the *crux gemmata* theme, such as on the mosaics of, S. Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna. (Fig. 117) (Roe 1965, Fig. 6)⁴⁰ This symbolic identification has proved influential; it also represents the basis of this thesis's specific exploration of the evolving symbolism and purpose of the High Cross form.

Developing on the earlier identifications of the High Cross form by Roe, as a representation of the *crux gemmata*, Richardson (1994: 183; 1984a: 130-132) has advanced this theme further, linking the identification of the bosses and the crosses as part of a thematic of the *crux gemmata*; directly to the jewelled cross that was erected over the Holy Sepulchre. The *crux gemmata* was a representation of the Jewelled Cross erected on the Hill of Golgotha to mark the site of Christ's crucifixion. She sees the capstones as representing, 'a canopy or building like the actual building at the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem'. Depictions of the structure are found on pilgrim flasks and other artefacts; see Figs 115,

³⁹ The *crux gemmata* is a central part of the redevelopment of Jerusalem by Christians after Constantine. The New Jerusalem has been described by Comblin as 'the City of God, the Christian Utopia of the Apocalypse containing many features of ancient mythology concerning the city: the cosmic mountain, the square base (*templum quadratum*), orientation, the processional avenue, the river of paradise, the tree of life, the sacred ramparts' (Comblin: 1968, 204-209 cited and trans. Doherty 1985: 46).

⁴⁰ The layout of the bosses on the Fahan Mura slab might be another example. Other representation are on the Basilica of St. Felix, Nola, apse mosaic (Fig. 118), mosaic at S. Pudenziana, at Rome c 400 A.D. (Fig. 119), a cross in the apse of St. Irene, Istanbul (Fig. 120)

116, 74⁴¹. A silver cross is recorded by Adomnán, in *De Locis Sanctis*, as a replacement for the wooden cross: 'Towards the east, in the place that is called in Hebrew Golgotha, another very large church has been erected. In the upper regions of this great round bronze chandelier with lamps is suspended by ropes and underneath it is placed a very large cross of silver, erected in the same place where once the wooden cross stood embedded, on which suffered the Saviour of the human race' (trans. Meehan 1958: 48-9)⁴².

The persuasiveness of Richardson's discussion is that she is able to explain the development of a consistent cross form within a theme and illustrate this comparatively with early Christian art from the east. Richardson has identified three common characteristics of the *crux gemmata*: representation it is decorated with gems⁴³; it has a pyramidal stepped base; and it has a canopy. These are all characteristics that can be found on Irish High Crosses: the use of bosses as decoration; the pyramidal bases – sometimes stepped; and the use of roof-like capstones⁴⁴. Richardson links this development to similar constructions in the Caucasus and east in the fifth to seventh centuries (1984a: 130), e.g. Fig. 123. However, Kelly (1991: 128) correctly cautions against an immediate connection between these monuments in this regard: 'unlike Irish capstones which surmount the monument, [the Caucasian examples] are contained within the structure of the stele below a small equal-armed cross which is placed at the apex'. This area of influences will be revisited in more detail in the final chapter.

The depiction of the Jewelled Cross as part of the Holy Sepulchre depictions was a popular and established motif before the crucifixion scene became more widespread (Richardson 1994: 177)⁴⁵. The canopy is part of the building that Constantine erected over the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem.

⁴¹ This form of the cross was commonly used before crucifixion scenes came into vogue (Richardson 1994: 177).

⁴² Additionally, Socrates Scholasticus (1880:47), from his *Ecclesiastical History of the Church*, under the year A.D.326, states 'The emperor's mother erected over the place of the sculpture a magnificent church, and named it New Jerusalem, having built it opposite to that old and deserted city. There she left a portion of the cross, enclosed in a silver cross, as a memorial to those that might wish to see it...'. A *crux gemmata* was set up by Theodosius II at Calvary, Jerusalem, in AD 417 (Edwards 1985: 400; Werner 1990: 7).

⁴³ Another popular Christian theme shares some of the same components. This is the theme of the wounds of Christ as five jewels or crosses in a pattern (Raw 1970: 240-241; Werner 1990: 209; Bryce 1989: 79). This theme is mentioned in the Dream of the Rood and the arrangement is found on both Irish and Anglo-Saxon art. These were obviously complex themes and a differentiated interpretation of these elements can reasonably be expected, leading to their depiction in a variety of different ways.

⁴⁴ In discussing the 'domed' capstone forms Richardson (1984a: 130) has suggested that it might represent a clochán (hut) but dismissed this, believing that they, 'more likely represent a domed building, which is the actual shape of the building erected above the Holy Sepulchre'. Richardson quotes Arculf as describing the Holy Sepulchre as 'all of stone and shaped to wondrous roundness on every side' (1984a: 131; *De Locis Sanctis*: 1; trans. Meehan 1958).

⁴⁵ Figure 252 compares the similarities between a depiction of the *Crux Gemmata* motif from Ireland and Armenia. The symbolic elements of jewels, cross form, bases and incised border are very similar for both slabs.

The stepped base signifies Golgotha, which has steps that led up to the great cross. There are prominent depictions of the Jewelled Cross in early Christian art, e.g. the Jewelled Cross depicted below the canopy at St Sophia (Richardson 1994: 180-181) and the Jewelled Cross on the starry heaven encircled by a jewelled wreath at St Apollinaire, Ravenna (Gough 1973, pl 155). Some other examples are illustrated here in Figs 117, 118 and 119. There are also eastern examples of stepped bases on eastern monuments that will be discussed later in this chapter.

There is consensus that the stepped or pyramidal bases are thought to represent the 'Steps to Golgotha', 'the place of the skull' (Roe 1965: 220-221; Richardson 1994: 179; Stalley 1996: 10). This representation of stepped bases goes back to the sixth century from Eastern sources. These symbolic associations could have been transmitted to Ireland on pilgrimage artefacts⁴⁶, e.g. on a sixth-century Coptic textile, the base of a wreathed cross shows the tenon and mortise in a cross section (Fig. 130)⁴⁷, a design that unites many of the morphological features discussed so far in a non-Irish setting⁴⁸. Furthermore, on the early cross *stelae* from the east, the stepped base is a consistent feature: e.g. on Armenian Christian monuments (Richardson 1994: 179, 182-183). Stalley (1996: 10-11) suggests that distinctive stepped design was copied from the memorial cross at Golgotha: 'according to pilgrims who visited Jerusalem, the rock of Golgotha was cut into a narrow block, with a slot at the top for the cross'. It has been suggested that the St Patrick's Cross, Co. Tipperary was constructed on a stepped base with a limestone plinth so that the base could be viewed with greater ease, though this might have been a later addition (Lynch 1983: 15-16). This step was sometimes more symbolic than functional: a characteristic of the Blackwater Crosses pyramidal bases is that the steps at the top are especially shallow (Hamlin 1994: 187) (Compare Data 51-55).

While Richardson has successfully expanded our understanding of Cross morphology, from the perspective of symbolic considerations, her views are limited in that they do not directly address the innovation of the ringed crosshead within this theme. Earlier, Roe (1965: 224-225, Fig. 7.2) suggested that a *imago clipeata* (Fig. 105), such as is found on three Bobbio pilgrim flasks, might be the origins of the ringed High Cross form: 'the prefiguration of the form which in Irish hands became the characteristic, freestanding, ring-headed High Cross'. While this is not a common form on the

⁴⁶ A more detailed discussion on the nature of eastern contact with Ireland is covered in the beginning of Chapter Eight.

⁴⁷ We also find the use of steps as a prominent feature on Constantinople coins at this time (Figs. 132, 133). The Anglo-Saxon Wilton Cross (Fig. 134) is based on a similar coin and appears to have arranged so the wearer could view the cross.

⁴⁸ There is also a small cross at in the centre of *The Heavenly Ladder Page* (Fig. 131; Sevchenko 1998, Fig. 7.39) dating to the sixth century on a manuscript from Mt. Sinai. This also shows the same socketed-base, a common feature on most Irish crosses.

twenty instances of this depiction on the Bobbio pilgrim flasks it is found on Byzantine coins of the same date (Figs 67 – 76, 106, 107). Werner (1990: 36, footnote 19) notes a lost seventeenth-century description of a mosaic: '(perhaps of the seventh century) in the vault of the Chapel of Adam in the Holy Sepulchre complex, pictured was a jewelled cross with an *imago clipeata* of Christ at its centre rising from the steps of Golgotha. This depiction would seem to match that on the Bobbio flasks. Angels were on either side and also an inscription reading NICKA'. The significance of this theme will be discussed shortly.

Depictions of the Cross, surmounted by the haloed bust of Christ, are common in early Christian art. The halo as a possible source for the ringed form drew their inspiration from the scenes found on pilgrim flasks (Roe 1965: 217-220) (such as Figs 67 to 76). These cross forms are linked to depictions of the *crux gemmata*. The ringed cross form – especially as a *crux gemmata* – has been connected by several studies to differing depictions of the True Cross (Raw 1970, Mahler 1978, Werner 1990). Kelly (1983, 1991) has offered a plausible explanation that links the Irish High Cross form to a description of the True Cross recorded by Adomnán. She suggests that the origins the High Cross form were influenced by or copied from eastern designs. Richardson (1994) also looked to the east for the origins of the cross form, developing parts of Roes (1965) theory that the High Cross and their capstones represent structures of the Holy Sepulchre. While both of these theories offer key insights into the High Cross form – in particular the importance of eastern models of their development – they do not explain the unique ringed form of the crosses and other technical innovations that will be discussed over the following chapters. This scholarly research into the role of the True Cross as a model for the High Crosses will be discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter of the study. Before investigating Roes connection between the halo and the cross ring in more detail it is useful to review scholarly research into the origins of the ringed cross symbol and the cross-in-circle motif.

THE CROSS HEAD

The origins of the ringed head are problematic, in that there is such a diversity and abundance of sources that might have contributed to its development. Central to this discussion is the ability to differentiate between the development of the architectural form and role of symbolic themes. The apparent interconnected matrix of meanings and associations of these early cross symbols complicate consideration of these themes.

There have been suggestions that the development of the ringed head was functional. Scherman in her analysis of cross morphology suggests a functional view linking the origin of the ringed head to these processional crosses:

the stone crosses typically associated with Ireland - those with an open ring where the shaft and arms cross ... - were modeled on processional wooden crosses. When these heavy wooden crosses were carried, there would have been a strain at the cross piece; this had to be reinforced with stays transversing the four angles, and designers chose the circle as the most attractive shape for this purpose (1981: 316).

Others have argued that the ring is not a natural shape for stone (Roe 1965: 213-214; Stalley 1996: 9-11)

However, there are obvious connections between the form of the ringed High Cross and the popularity of the cross symbol, in particular the incised crosses within a circle, found in the region during the same time. The cross was in use centuries before its introduction into the symbolic vocabulary of fourth/fifth century Ireland. There is also evidence of the pre-Christian use of the cross symbol and variations of this motif in many cultures. Ó Ríordáin (1947b: 111-112) dated the Irish introduction of the ringed crosses as early as the first half of the eighth century. This chronology is based on the correlation of names between the inscription - OR AR CHUINDULAS - on a slab from Clonmacnois with an Abbot of the same name, who died between AD 720 and 724⁴⁹. Notably, this slab has an inscribed ringed cross. This places an incised ringed cross as early as AD 720 - 724, assuming the inscription and the name in the *Annals* are the same (Swift 1994: 248) and that the cross was inscribed at the same time as the inscription.

The base Christian cross, as an artistic motif, was in use in Britain before its introduction to Ireland. The cross first appears on Christian grave markers and other ecclesiastical stones in western Britain and Ireland for the first time around 600AD (Thomas 1973b: 23). The symbolism associated with the shape and distinct variations of the cross form is vital to our understanding of the cross and the role it played in early insular society. Variations of the cross form have been recorded; for example over 13 different types of crosses are recognised on Pictish slabs alone (Laing & Laing 1993: 134) and Lionard (1960) was able to categorise many more forms than that on the Irish slabs⁵⁰. Each of these types would have their own associations or they could be explained as ornamental variations that evolved naturally from experimentation. Although some of these forms were undoubtedly

⁴⁹ Edwards (1985:399) does not express much confidence in this date.

⁵⁰ Higgins (1987: 47-49) in his study of incised crosses on slabs at Co. Galway identified seven distinct major types.

copied from foreign models, it is not clear if the original meanings were kept (Lionard 1960: 100-101)⁵¹. In Ireland, the use of the cross is derived from the significance of Christ's crucifixion, and was iconised in a simple form to represent both the belief system and its founder. Due to the use of the ringed High Cross form, it is not unreasonable to expect some specific link between this form and the meaning of the cross-in-circle motif.

The most obvious cross symbol with similarities to the High Cross form is the cross-in-circle motif. The use of the cross-in-circle – while linked closely with Ireland – originates from a broader and more established tradition. The cross-in-circle was first used by the Romans and in the east during the fourth to fifth centuries (Roe 1965: 219). Edwards (1985: 402) agrees that the most likely origins of this motif were from the early Christian Mediterranean. She has also found the motif on Scottish, Manx, Welsh⁵² and Cornish sculpture; though known in England⁵³ the design was not used on stone crosses until the later Viking period (Edwards 1985: 402). The device has also been found in Coptic⁵⁴ contexts, other parts of North Africa (Nash Williams 1950: 16) and Armenia⁵⁵.

There is some consensus on the symbolic meaning of this motif. The circle is also believed to be a representation of wreaths placed on the cross. These were ancient symbols of triumph, a 'garland of victory' (Lionard 1960: 100; Roe 1965: 217-219; Edwards 1985: 397; Stalley 1996: 9), identified as declaring the universal victory of Christ (Roe 1965: 217-219; Raw 1970: 246; Harbison 1992: 350-351). These garlands could have been adapted from Roman army traditions from the fourth and fifth centuries (Fig. 64, 65). There are many additional variations of the cross-in-circle form. Significantly, the cross-in-circle as an incised motif on slabs are frequently found in a west and east

⁵¹ There are cross variant forms that have clear associations, e.g. a few crosses are depicted emerging from an upturned or semi-circular line, e.g. the slab at Inishmurray, Co. Sligo and Killadeas slab, Co. Fermanagh (Lionard 1961: Fig. 8.1 and Fig. 9.1) and an inscribed cross in the south-west corner of a children's burial ground in Feenune (Corlett 1993: 169). This symbol is thought to represent a boat or anchor (Lionard 1961: 139). The 'ship of the church' or 'the anchor' was perceived as being interchangeable with the crucifixion cross. This was made of wood and Noah's Ark is believed to have been constructed on the same measurements as the human body (Henry 1967: 142). The imagery of this form of cross would have been a simple and powerful metaphor. The curved shape also is reminiscent of lunar shapes, associated closely with water symbolism.

⁵² Nash-Williams (1950: 107) dates an encircled cross on a stone at Castell Dwyran, Wales, to the mid-sixth century.

⁵³ The motif is found in England around the same time, e.g. on the Canterbury Medalet, a sixth-century medalet from the Churchyard of St. Martins, Canterbury (Fig. 81) in the form of a Patriarchal cross – this was a circle around the major transom (horizontal bar) of a Latin cross form (Werner 1990: 190-191, Fig 10).

⁵⁴ The circular cross can be found on Coptic sculpture, such as on the tombstone of *Apa Dorotheos* (Beckwith 1963: 29, Fig. 127) (also see Figs 111, 136).

⁵⁵ The ringed cross also occurs on Armenian stelae such as the Etchmiadzin slab, Katchk'ar (Fig.137), a contemporary of the early Irish High Crosses (Der Nersessian 1977: 198, Fig 151).

position (Lionard 1960: 100). This has solar symbolism⁵⁶ as well as contextual importance, as shall be discussed in more detail below.

THE *CHI-RHO* MOTIF

One of the most common theories about the development of the ringed-headed Irish cross is that this was a design based on the *chi-rho* motif ✠. 'Within the mainstream of early Christian thought, the shape of the letter *chi* was associated with the cross. Known as *crux decussata*, the figure takes its name from *decussis*, the Roman number (X) ten, which is the figure of the cross' (Lewis 1980: 142). It has also been suggested that the *chi-rho* takes its meaning from the first two letters of *Christos* ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ, following Constantine's 'Edict of Milan' making it the Roman Empire's official symbol (Collingwood 1926: 322; Nash Williams 1950: 15; Thomas 1971: 100-101)⁵⁷. The *chi-rho* as a symbol became more stylised in expression when the armies of Rome used it. It, like other cross symbols, might have had an earlier non-Christian usage. It was also used for a while as a symbol of Greek accountancy (Stevenson 1982: 88). Nash Williams (1950: 15) has suggested that the symbol had its origins in pagan symbolism and that this added to its initial appeal to early Christians.

A likelihood that needs consideration is that the one symbol could have different meanings to the same or different audiences, depending on the context of its use or combinations of use within communication. This can be illustrated by a suggestion of Lewis (1980: 142-143), who believes that the *chi-rho* derives additional meaning from 'an earlier patristic tradition [that] formulated a conception of the incarnation and salvation within a cosmological interpretation of the *chi*-cross, probably based on Plato's metaphysical figure from the *Timaeus* of a *chi*-shaped world structure'. Lewis goes on to quote Justin⁵⁸, stating that the *chi* cross was the 'greatest symbol of power of the Logos Incarnate'. However, this would imply a meaning that would have been out of the reach of the illiterate and uneducated. Furthermore, Lewis (1980: 153) also suggests that thematic sets might have specific meanings suggesting that the three Christian images of: 'Christ enthroned', *crux gemmata* and the *chi-rho* represent the tripartite dogma of nativity, death and resurrection. Undoubtedly, many other combinations took on new meanings and significance. There are also hidden crosses appearing

⁵⁶ The cross-in-circle motif has connections to the wheels of the solar chariot of earlier pan-Indo-European religions.

⁵⁷ Ó Carragáin (1989: 18, 24) has also suggested that the *chi* was used to represent the first letter of Christ's name. He cites examples from the Monasterboice and Kells Crosses where 'saints' cross their croziers to form an 'X' on panels (Fig. 113a).

⁵⁸ From the *First Apology of Justin Martyr* (LXXVII): 'And whereas Plato, in his *Timaeus*, philosophising about the Son of God, says, "He expressed Him upon the universe in the figure of the letter X"...[Plato] not knowing it to be a type of cross, and having only the idea of the letter X in his mind, said, that the next power to the Supreme God was decussated or figured in the shape of a cross upon the universe' (trans. Kaye 1912: 72).

in other ornamental patterns such as spirals, frets and interlace that would have only been visible to the trained eye (Stevenson 1982: 20; Hamlin 1994: 193).

Ultimately the popularity of the *chi-rho* in Christian contexts is derived from Constantine's vision and subsequent raising of the cross as his standard, known as the 'triumph of the cross'⁵⁹. The mid-ninth century *Anonymous Life of Constantine* records that, losing in battle against Byzantium:

Reduced to despair, the great emperor raised his eyes to heaven, he saw, just as he had also formerly seen in the war against the tyrant Maxentius, writing in stars which said to him: "Call on me in the day of your distress and I shall rescue you and you will glorify me". Amazed at the miraculous vision, he looked again and saw a cross made out of stars fixed in the sky and the following written message: "In this sign you will conquer all your foes"...without delay he drew his dirk and made the emblem of the Cross out of a piece of wood, and began to take the initiative in this war' (BHG 364, trans. Montserrat and Lieu 1996: 126-127)⁶⁰.

As a Christian symbol, the *chi-rho* is believed to have been in use for only a brief time, superseded in the fifth century by the simpler Latin and Greek variations (Hamlin 1972: 24-26; Kilbride-Jones 1994: 10-11). The *chi-rhos* that are found in Ireland have been investigated by Hamlin (1982b: 289) in a useful synthesis of their development as being a simpler, later, monogram form, common in Mediterranean lands in the fifth and sixth centuries but found in more distinct areas in the sixth, seventh and even eighth centuries. Figure 141 illustrates some degraded forms that Hamlin has identified. The forms vary noticeably and suggest different influences or models. A variety of cross forms are considered to be a debasement of the *chi-rho* monogram or merged components of similar simple designs of marigolds, rosettes or other patterns in circles (Higgins 1987: 61).

⁵⁹ A mosaic from c. 540, at Ravenna (Fig 140) shows a shield of a soldier of the emperor Justinian with stars on it and the *chi-rho* symbol. Coins of the time where Constantine wears the *chi-rho* symbol on his brow (Fig. 138). Figure 139 shows a classic Constantinian *chi-rho* monogram from the sixth-century.

⁶⁰ This event is also described by Socrates Scholasticus, writing c. 439 AD and seen as a source for later historians, (1880:3), from his *Ecclesiastical History of the Church*, under the year A.D. 306, talks about the sign that Constantine saw: 'In this state of uncertainty, a preternatural vision, which transcends all description, appeared to him as he was marching at the head of his troops: he saw, about that part of the day when the sun after passing the meridian begins to decline towards the west, a pillar of light in the heavens, in the form of a cross, on which were inscribed the words, BY THIS CONQUER'. Another account of the vision is reported by Philostorgius (trans. Walford 1850: 432), from his *Ecclesiastical History of the Church*, also reports the sign in the sky viewed by Constantine: 'in a battle in which the sign of the cross was seen in the East, vast in extent and lit up with glorious light, and surrounded on each side by stars like a rainbow, symbolising the form of letters. The letters too were in the Latin tongue and formed the words, "In hoc signo vinces"'. These visions of the cross were shared by later emperors as well. Sozomen, writing in the fifth century, (trans. Walford 1850: 149), from his *Ecclesiastical History of the Church*, reports that other emperors subsequently also saw the cross in the sky following Constantine vision.

There is little material evidence of the *chi-rho* monogram in its original form in Ireland⁶¹, although it is present on the continent in the seventh-century (Lionard 1960: 100-101)⁶². The distribution of the 'Constantinian' form ✠ or 'monogram' ⊕ forms has been shown by Hamlin (1972, Fig. 3). The 'Constantinian' form has not been found in Ireland. The distribution of the *chi-rho* motif in Ireland is almost entirely along the coastline, which indicates its use in Ireland is dependent on foreign models (Higgins 1987: 190). There are some indications that Ireland was exposed to the motif in different forms⁶³. While there are different treatments of the *chi-rho* found on grave-slabs they are mainly in either in ✠ or ⊕ forms of the XP. There are also examples of variations of the Constantinian initials of XPS, IHS, XP where there is not the 'vague memory of the *Labarum* of Constantine' in the motif (Lionard 1960: 138). We also sometimes find the use of *alpha* and *omega* symbols with monograms; but these symbols are also found by themselves (Lionard 1960: 139).

Kilbride-Jones (1994: 10) rightly points out that a distinction has to be made between those *chi-rhos* that are plain and those that are surrounded by a circle, believing that, 'the circle is a separate symbol on its own account'. The circle places the cross equidistant from the centre, hence there is no beginning or ending and it becomes a symbol of everlasting life. This distinction can be taken a step further, as the deliberate placement of the cross at the centre of the circle; making the cross quaquaversal, i.e. pointing in all directions, effectively placing the *chi-rho*, and therefore Christ, as the centre of the cosmos. This allows the *chi-rho* symbol, within the circle, to act as a symbol of immortality, life and omniscience⁶⁴. From this perspective, the cross-in-circle can be seen to signify the *axis mundi* – the world axis, which shall be investigated in more detail in Chapter Four.

Another variation on the *chi-rho* is its merging with the *flabellum* motif (Lionard 1960: 111). In Lionard's analysis, the Irish examples usually have a *Rho* with a loop clinging to one arm of the *chi-rho* (Fig. 146c). Another variant of the cross-of-arcs has been identified in the degenerate *flabellum* motif⁶⁵. Henry (1965: 118) believed that a cross with a long handle, framed in a circle, of thick or

⁶¹ A *chi-rho* monogram was discovered on an Iona slab dating to the seventh century (RCAHMS 1982: 44). The *chi* is also found in the *Book of Durrow* (fol 23) and the *Book of Kells* has a *chi-rho* that ends in a human head. Lewis (1980: 142) believes that this might signify the *nomen sacrum*, known in insular scriptoria by the end of the seventh century. A simplified *chi-rho* monogram was found on a small sandstone pebble, at Kilcarbon, Dominican Priory, Co. Galway (Fig. 144) (Higgins 1993: 164), which indicates that the motif was used on mobile and possibly private media.

⁶² There is also some evidence of the *chi-rho* in Britain as early as the fourth century (Stevenson 1982: 86).

⁶³ Lionard has noted similarities and differences between motifs in Ireland (Fig. 145).

⁶⁴ This feature will be discussed in more detail in relation to the placement of crucifixion scenes within the centre of the crosshead.

⁶⁵ The 'Cross of Arcs' are found on *ogam* stones and pillars (Fig. 142) in the sixth-century, on upright slabs of the seventh century and recumbent slabs of the eighth century. They have been described as a degenerate *chi-*

thin ribbons, represented a *flabellum* made of peacock feathers. This could be a symbol of watchfulness and sometimes a symbol of a faithful disciple, e.g. as seen on the slab from Inishmurray, Co. Sligo (Henry 1965: 119, Fig. 13). The cross form derived directly from a *flabellum* or perhaps a representation of the object itself, e.g. the seventh-century stele at Cardonagh, Co. Donegal or the cross-slab at Kilvickadownig (861) (Fig. 147) (Cuppige 1986: 327, Fig. 196, PL 37). The *flabellum* or metal fans covered holy oils when not in use (Fig. 148). Their use would have been ritualised in Irish practice (Richardson 1993: 27-30; Mytum 1992: 92-93), and an example of this use in the east is illustrated on an eleventh-century mosaic (Fig. 149).

SYMBOLISM DISCUSSION

Understanding the meanings and relationships of the most frequently used cross variations can provide a better understanding of the complexity in the ringed High Cross form's meaning. This discussion also indicates that symbolic considerations were as important as structural developments, if not more, in the choice and evolution of the High Cross form. How these cross-in-circles are related and differentiated assists in building this understanding.

The *flabellum* is sometimes described as a *crux ansata* – a portable handled cross. The most common form of the *crux ansata* is the *ankh* (see Figs 150, 151, 152, 153, 154). The Egyptian *ankh* (*crux ansata*) is the name of the hieroglyph 𓀀 that represented a womb sealed off by a masculine cross or 'key'⁶⁶ – a 'sa' glyph 𓀀 with a similar shape means protection (Napier 1992: 119). If we recall the positioning of Christ in the centre of the later ringed High Cross heads, part of this symbolism may have been in use. This would be an apposite location for Christ to be represented crucified, returning to the mother womb for his resurrection.

Another term for the *ankh* in Christian ritual is that of the pectoral cross. There are numerous examples of pectoral crosses in the forms of reliquaries worn over the chest, e.g. the Bischofshofen reliquary cross, and examples are incised onto cross slabs (Fig. 35b). This positioning places the bearer at the centre of the cross. There are crosses that are very similar to the Coptic designs, e.g. if we compare a grave-slab from Whitechurch, Co. Dublin (Fig. 156) with Figures 152, 153 and 154. Thomas (1971, Fig. 61) has linked Coptic *ankh* designs to a tradition of Insular face crosses⁶⁷.

rho monogram (Lionard 1961: 111, 156), e.g. a slab from Ballyvourney, Co. Cork (Fig. 143) has a cross of arcs with what might be a pilgrim above it (Hamlin 1982b: 287, Fig 17.2D).

⁶⁶ The *ankh* represents the joining of male and female organs.

⁶⁷ There was a small tradition of 'face crosses', where a face is shown instead of the intersection of the top cross arm (Fig. 85, 86, 87). This has been thought to have been inspired by sixth-century Coptic or Syro-

Notably, the *ankh* has two meanings 'life' or 'mirror' (Silverman 1990: 38), which might have aided in its pilgrimage associations and adoption. Early Christian pilgrims used the circular mirror, which could be a *flabellum*, for other purposes:

The holy nature of mirrors lay in the manner in which they were employed by the pilgrims, they would hold these mirrors up to the sacred relics to catch them in a reflection. When they returned to the villages, they exhibited their mirrors to friends and relatives, boasting that they had bought back physical evidence as well as the inspirational qualities of their pilgrimages because their mirrors had captured the reflection of the sacred scene (Goldberg 1985: 139)⁶⁸.

The meaning of the ringed cross, as an associated *flabellum* symbol, in this fashion would be to act as a witness. This would complement the use of Holy Sepulchre symbolism, through the relevant cross morphology, evoking a direct association with this primary Christian site. Furthermore, in some respect – if the audience understood this association – ringed crosses and the Irish High Crosses could act as witness to the crucifixion.

Other associated symbolism appears to build on this interpretation. Related to the *flabellum* in appearance is the *crux florida* – the flowering cross (see Fig. 156). This is perhaps the most notable absence of Irish cross motif variations – when compared to Western European and Eastern crosses – and may be related to the lack of vegetable ornament on the Irish crosses compared to British examples. Possibly the church sought to differentiate its imagery from the pre-Christian belief system where trees played a central role. Roe (1965: 220) believes that the *crux florida* was sometimes a depiction of the Tree of Life (Christ himself is identified as the Tree of Life, discussed in more detail below). She cites the adoration of the Cross scene from a pilgrim flask from Bobbio (Roe 1965, Fig. 5.1): here the *crux florida* is shown on a star studded shield on the hill of Golgotha. This is an identification that is supported by Werner (1990: 195) who claims that the *crux florida* can be depicted

Palestinian designs (Thomas 1971: 129-131; Roe 1960) or possibly a tradition independently developed (Mytum 1992: 70). Thomas has suggested that it might have been a clumsy local attempt to combine the idea of a cross with a crucified Christ. Examples are found at Kilbroney, Co. Down; Skellig Michael, Co. Kerry; Caher Island, Co. Mayo; Knappaghmanagh, Co. Mayo; Mason Island Co. Galway; Tobernacroisseneve, Co. Galway (Mytum 1992; fig 3: 11). It is not clear if these are attempts to create a haloed figure or are following other traditions. Hickey (1976: 14-16) has demonstrated from archaeological and documentary evidence that the cult of the head, or at least the symbolism of the head, was important in Ireland as late as the thirteenth century. It is also possible that the Cult of the Head in a sculptural form continued into early medieval times (Ross 1967; Rynne 1972: 79; Andersen 1977: 85-91).

⁶⁸ Eliade (1959) differentiates between the value – or adoration – of an artefact for what it represents in religious terms as a *heirophany* rather than for what it is materially. Eliade also identifies, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, that artefacts gain their relevance in ritual through their ability to act as witness.

as a variant of the *crux gemmata*. The cross functions as a 'tree of life', the bosses acting as the fruit of paradise. This demonstrates the close symbolic interrelationship between these three motifs: *flabellum*, *crux florida* and *crux gemmata*.

SYMBOLISM: CROSS HEAD AS HALO

The impact of this matrix of symbolism can be directly associated with the evolution of the ringed crosshead. Related to both the light symbolism of the *flabellum* and the *crux gemmata* is the treatment of Christ framed by light. This is one of the most obvious but least discussed origins of the ringed cross-head is that it might represent the halo of Christ. This is a view that has been suggested by Roe (1965, 1960). A halo or *nimbus* has been defined by as, 'a cloud of light, a halo emanating from divine or deified persons' (Ladner 1983: 147)⁶⁹. Any ringed item, such as a wreath around a cross motif, could be interpreted as representing a nimbus since the cross is symbolic of Christ. The problem in assuming this symbolic connection in Ireland is that the physical placement of Christ at the centre of the High Crosses appears to be a relatively late development. In terms of representation, the cross form appears to move from skeuomorphic representations of a cross model to a symbolic representation of a cross at a location – and possible historical moment.

Before exploring this further, it is useful to review the use of halo in representations of this time. The depiction of Christ within a halo is familiar in European and eastern art. Some depictions have a halo with a cross behind Christ's head (compare Figs 66, 67, 69, 71). There is also the *crux clipeata* where a cross is shown with an encircled portrait of Christ at the centre; identified as 'the glory of God centering on the Christ' (Stevenson 1982: 2-3, 7). This *imago clipeata* was a shield portrait with the insignia of Christ (Roe 1965: 218-219)⁷⁰. The cross represented Christ's crucifixion and the circular emblem for God in his cosmic splendour (Reuterswärd 1986: 115-116). On the High Crosses, Veelenturf (1997:29), in his analysis of eschatological iconography of the High Crosses, links the halo to iconographic depictions of 'Christ in Glory' where 'glory' is defined as 'an aureole, a halo' which is a formal differentiating factor from other iconographic representations of Christ.

⁶⁹ This phenomenon of light around a being is also associated with the early Irish saints (Picard 1981: 95). Plummer (1910:cxxxvii) summarises associations with light from the *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*: 'fiery manifestations at, or prior to, birth or during childhood, heavenly light accompanying the saint, fantastic fire that does no hurt, luminous appearances at death or burial, fire brought down from heaven, or supernaturally kindled, fire carried or handled with impunity, the fingers of the saint five light or fire, miraculous extinction of or deliverance from fire, daylight prolonged miraculously...'

⁷⁰ This is sometimes depicted with flanking *Victories* or angels (Fig. 77, 78). Werner (1987: 7) has identified a common theme of an encircled Christ above a gem-studded cross, flanked by angels, on Coptic and Eastern art.

The popularity of this symbolism was driven by its association with the pivotal moment of Christ's life: his rebirth as a divine being. Related to this is one of the main themes of early medieval Christian art was the return of Christ and the second coming. The Church was uncertain as to how to depict Christ after his 'transfiguration' because his nature was divine (Charles Murray 1993: 331)⁷¹. The Munich plaque (c.400) (Fig. 79) demonstrates this in a figurative representation of Christ. It shows the apostles unable to look at Christ following the transfiguration: his head is surrounded by a circular halo of light as he is assisted into heaven by the hand of God (*manus dei*) (Kessler 1993: 110, Fig. 1). To counter this difficulty in comprehension, Christ was not always figuratively represented. Reuterswärd has suggested that the circular cosmic representations were Docetist, referring to the doctrine or belief that Christ's body was not human. He was either a phantasm or of real but celestial substance and that therefore his sufferings were only apparent⁷². He cites as examples, 'on the crosses ... at Bealin, Kilfenora, Dupplin and on Iona, the two natures of Christ are kept so strictly apart that one might be tempted to think of two separate divinities - Christ on the east side versus a solar deity on the west' (1986: 116)⁷³.

Was the ringed crosshead a halo? We should note that there appear to be square forms of haloes and that the Caher Island cross-slabs 13 and 15 appear to be square (Fig. 22)⁷⁴. These slabs may conform to the design of a patriarchal cross that shows a second and shorter transom from the name plate above Christ's head, e.g. see figs 69, 80, 81 (Werner 1990: 184, Figs 6a-d). However, the square form of the Caher Island slabs does not show two transoms⁷⁵. However, the clear majority of cross forms, depicting haloes, use the ringed form.

⁷¹ Christ first reveals his divine nature after his resurrection in: Mark: 9: 2-3: 'And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into a high mountain a part by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.'; Mathew: 17:2: 'and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.'; and Luke: 9:29: 'And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening.' A depiction of Christ, 'surrounded by a *mandorla* and light [radiating] from the figure in all directions ... was to become the standard type of representation, in both the Catholic and in the Eastern churches' (Reuterswärd 1986: 96).

⁷² Another illustration of this theme can be found on a single coin of Ecgfrith of Northumbria (king ca. 670-685) shows a cross surrounded by light rays and the inscription '+ LUX' (Werner 1990: 191; Lyon 1955: 227). This would appear to emphasise the cosmic nature of both the cross and Christ as well as representing the secular (human) king Ecgfrith.

⁷³ The contrasting of Christ's human and divine form is found in Irish literature of this period. Byrnes (1992: 175) in a study of the *Poems of Blathmac* (c.750 AD) believes that the poet was interested in Christ's humanity, divinity and kingship: 'a king who was God, who was true man' (PB: 17, trans. Carney 1964: 7). Byrnes believes that the poem consists of two parts, the first focusing on the humanity of Christ and the second on the divine nature of Christ. He (1992: 178-179) also suggests that this theme is also found on the High Crosses and art of the time.

⁷⁴ Herity (1995: 117) who has described them as 'hammerhead' crosses, dates them to the seventh century.

⁷⁵ Some incised crosses from Reask, Co. Kerry (Fig. 82, 83, 84) are thought to be attempts at representing a *titulus* - the bar above Christ's head. Standing stones B, C and G at Reask (Fanning 1981: 141, Fig 29) all have

Reviewing these findings, on the Irish High Crosses we find four structural changes occur at the same time as Christ starts to be depicted in the centre of the cross head⁷⁶:

1. the bosses on the 'east' face are removed and are replaced by a figural depiction of Christ⁷⁷ (depictions of Christ on both faces also occurs)
2. Bosses become more abstract and geometric
3. 'Rolls' appear in the 'armpits', where the transom intersects with the cross shaft
4. There is an increased use of the perforated crosshead. While this increased use of perforation has been attributed to an improvement in techniques in the tools and the quality of the quarry stone, the perforation may be intended to recreate the 'halo' of Christ⁷⁸.

these features. There is also an example from the Dingle Peninsula (Fig. 83). These have been related to a similar motif found on Welsh stones (Nash-Williams 1950: 20-23, No 219, 328).

⁷⁶ It is generally accepted that crosses are aligned east and west (to be discussed following). However, Veelenturf (1997:126) cautions that we do not know the original location and orientation for the majority of crosses. He agrees with Harbison (1992:273) that crucifixion scenes are generally found on the west face of the head but is more reserved in accepting the view that crosses with Christ on the east face are later crosses, as is suggested by Harbison. While the orientation and placement of the crosses has an influence on their interpretation, the purpose of the present discussion is to investigate the development of the perforated ring and associated morphological changes and symbolic considerations.

⁷⁷ While this is a structural observation, it is worth noting that Veelenturf (1997) has challenged the precise identification of Christ figures by Harbison (1992). Veelenturf posits that because of the similarity in choice and treatment of the iconography on the High Crosses that there was a 'decorations program' guiding their creation – his focus is on the eschatological scenes. The key depictions that contribute to the eschatological theme are the *Maiestas Domini*, the Second Coming, The last Judgment and the Crucifixion. While there is not time in the present study to review his conclusions, he does provide a compelling analysis for revisiting some of the iconographic identification detailed in the *IHCPS*, in particular identifications of *Maiestas Domini* and some Second Coming scenes. Relevant to the present discussion is that he links the 'theophoric' depictions of Crucifixion scenes (without a cross being depicted) as being eschatological in nature. Perhaps the most significant finding from Veelenturf's work, for this study, is the view that the meaning of the iconography on Irish crosses is found in 'the paring of images, reciprocal confirmation, superposition of meanings and temporal strata' rather than meaning or identification being derived from formal characteristics of the iconography alone. With this in mind, he believes that the eschatological meaning of some crosses can be found in placement of the Crucifixion in contrast to Second Coming and Last Judgment scenes. This has implications for how the crosses were read and by whom, since he believes it 'is very unlikely that a narrative chronological principle' was adhered to when the crosses were being decorated. His work presents two challenges for this study in that he believes that 'the imagery is too sophisticated to be instructive to the illiterate' while suitable for devotional contemplation. Secondly, related to this is that he sees the cross morphology – as a cross of Golgotha – reinforcing this iconography as focused on the idea of redemption. Both of these ideas will be explored and challenged over the subsequent chapters. For the purpose of this discussion, what, figurative or aniconic, is found at the centre of the cross heads is important. This is with the aim of determining if there is a possible symbolic explanation for the development of the perforated ring as part of a composite message.

⁷⁸ Briefly looking at the decoration of the cross heads many of these changes can be seen as evolution over time. Solid-ringed crosses are seen as earlier to the more developed perforated-ringed crosses. In terms of the criterion above (orientations from *IHCPS*), of the 20 perforated-ringed crosses that have Christ depicted on the west-head, 10 also have a Christ scene on the east-head; of the remaining crosses, on the eastern heads we find nine with a geometric device (not a formal boss) and one has a boss. There are 6 perforated-ringed crosses that have only an eastern Christ: 4 of these have geometric devices on the west face and the remaining 2 are

This 'halo' would have been created by the light passing through the perforated rings creating a halo around the figure at the intersection of the cross and the transom. Reuterswärd (1986: 95) discusses church windows such as at the church of St Catherine's, Mt. Sinai, (c. sixth century), that had 'divine light' coming through the windows. The light transmitted through the windows was called the 'light of God' - *ego sum lux*. The term is present on numerous continental *Majestas* representations and this phrase is thought to be based on John 8:12: 'then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life'. An attendant at morning ritual service at one of the east crosses, looking at the west face, would see Christ or a boss/geometric device haloed with the light of the morning sun.

This might be a contributing reason for why major Irish High Crosses are located to the east of monasteries, e.g. The Market Crosses, Armagh and Kells, the Tuam cross and the Downpatrick Cross (Fig. 88) (Aitchison 1994: 224). Henry (1965: 135) believed that Irish High Crosses, 'are always strictly orientated, facing east and west'. Aitchison (1994: 224-225) supports this, stating that churches and High Crosses show evidence for cardinal orientation on an east-west basis. Early hermitage structures may have been organised in a similar fashion. The *clochán* at the Hermitage on Ardoileán, Co. Galway has a west doorway and an eastern window that let light in. Herity indicates that this was the normal orientation for huts of this kind (1990: 96). Graves also appear aligned east-west: site 1 at Knockea, Co. Limerick, had 66 graves, all with their heads situated to the west (O'Kelly 1967: 76). This might have been to allow the dead to see the coming of Christ upon his resurrection. The belief was that when Christ returns it will be from the east.

It is informative to compare Irish crosses to the Pictish stones here. While there are some Pictish ringed crosses e.g. the Aberlemno slab (Fig. 17), Angus, or Meigle No.2, Perthshire, there are no freestanding or perforated crosses. Interestingly, Pictish sculpture avoided New Testament subject

undecorated. Having Christ on both sides correlates to other more developed symbolic morphological features with seven-of-the-ten having rolls on the inner ring or armpits (of 18 perforated-ringed crosses with this feature). Suggesting they are later and more developed crosses. Additionally, of these seven, five have roof or reliquary capstones. All of these crosses have more developed figurative and aniconic decorations, suggesting they are later representations.

This can be compared to solid-ringed crosses where there are five depictions of Christ on the west face, two with Christ on the opposing face, one opposing geometric device, one opposing boss and one cross with another opposing iconic figure. For the solid-ringed crosses that have an eastern Christ depiction, but not a western depiction, there are five with geometric devices on the west-head.

Notably, there are eight perforated-ringed crosses that have bosses on both faces and five that have a geometric device on both faces. Combinations of bosses and geometric devices are rarer with only two having a combination of both boss and geometric device. This might indicate the development forward from the original skeuomorphic elements. On solid-ringed crosses, nine have geometric devices on both sides, two have a boss on both sides, two have an eastern boss and western geometric device, and four have a western boss and eastern geometric device. (This data can be seen in table 92 and 93)

matter (Laing & Laing 1993: 134-135). There was a preference for Old Testament material tied into themes of salvations (David, Jonah, Daniel and Sampson) or the hermit saints - Paul and Anthony. This might explain why they never used perforated slabs or standing stones. The symbolism of the form and decoration of the High Crosses are connected to the imagery surrounding the crucifixion. If the focus of Pictish art was on the Old Testament rather than the crucifixion there would be little need to adopt this High Cross form⁷⁹.

Although the Picts did not have perforated crosses, Stevenson (1956: 89), in describing the circular cross notes, that, the Glamis and the Aberlemno (No. 2 & 3) 'relief crosses have indented semi-circular armpits like the St Oran's cross and straight-sided arms. The hollows are normally each completed into a circle by a semi-circular moulding. These form a quadrilobate "halo", not a circular one'. Stevenson believes that the design should be compared with the *crux gemmata* that is found on fourth-century and fifth-century late Roman pottery in Constantinople. These designs have been also been referred to as 'hollowed angles' (Lionard 1960: 116) and Kendrick (1939: 16) has used the term 'Thistle Crosses' because of their shape of the space in between the arms.

Another way of looking at a quadrilobate 'halo' is that it is the result of an 'anistropic' perception where light and dark is viewed: they do not have equal weight to the eye (Arnheim 1956: 222-223). This technique was familiar in Irish art, e.g. on the side of the Bell of St Patrick's the crosses and swastikas are defined by an anistropic effect (Fig. 51, 52). A similar effect is called 'figure - ground' perception where the light and dark objects alternate, as objects in the vision field begins to emerge in consciousness (Vernon 1962: 42-45). The effect of exposure to change in the physical intensity of light constitutes a change in the 'differential threshold of vision'. This is believed to cause images to remain the vision as a greenish or blue shade (Vernon 1962: 46-47). In optics this is called an 'afterimage'. If one stared into a perforated Irish High Cross with the sun behind it, one would get the anistropic quadrilobate cross in one's vision.

⁷⁹ Alternatively, Henderson (1982: 84) has suggested that the Pictish use of cross-slab rather than a freestanding slab, was to allow 'the Picts to keep their national symbols separate from the cross symbol...the reason for the Picts' failing to adopt the free-standing cross eventually favoured by all their neighbours may be that they were reluctant to place symbols on the cross shape. On the other hand the base would have been a perfectly suitable place for symbols and the Picts may have retained the slab for traditional reasons'.

It might be related to Gregory of Nyssa's definition of the symbolism behind the cross⁸⁰. Summarising this symbolism Ladner states:

If we imagine the power of God as it holds together the four main spatial extensions of the world, heavenward and downward, and toward both sides, then the shape of the Cross will "automatically" be "seen" in or by our mind; the four projections which issue from the centre of the Cross correspond to the four spatial directions which are perceived in everything that is: the above and below and lateral limits (1983: 198).

Meditating on an Irish High Cross on its cosmic face would make this a reality⁸¹. It can also be said that staring at a High Cross on a starry night would create a *crux gemmata*⁸². This might be the effect that the early carvers were trying to achieve: the visual image of a transfigured Christ. There are numerous examples in the gospels referring to God and Jesus in terms of light⁸³. Light is also linked by Justin, in the *First Apology of Justin Martyr*, to the central Christian rite of baptism: 'baptism is called illumination because the minds of the catechumens who are thus washed are illumined... moreover, the person baptised and illumined is baptised in the name of Jesus Christ...' (LXXX, trans. Kaye

⁸⁰ Gregory of Nyssa in *Against Eunomius*. Book V interprets the symbolism of the cross from Eph:3:18 'May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height'. Gregory states: 'To the Ephesians, moreover, he describes by the figure of the Cross the power that controls and holds together the universe, when he expresses a desire that they may be exalted to know the exceeding glory of this power, calling it height, and depth, and breadth, and length, speaking of the several projections we behold in the figure of the Cross by their proper names, so that he called the upper part "height" and that which is below, on the opposite side of the junction, "depth", while by the name "length and breadth" he indicates the cross-beam projecting to either side, that hereby might be manifested this great mystery, that both things in heaven, and things under the earth, and all the furthest bounds of the things that are, are ruled and sustained by Him Who gave an example of this unspeakable and mighty power in the figure of the Cross' (trans. Schaff and Wace 1979: 177). He also discussed the form and symbolism of the cross in 'The Great Catechism' (1979: 500) '...this is the very thing that we learn from the figure of the Cross; it is divided into four parts, so that there are the projections, four in number, from the central point where the whole converges upon itself; because He Who at the hour of His pre-arranged death was stretched upon it is He Who binds together all things into Himself, and by Himself brings to one harmonious agreement the diverse natures of actual existences'.

⁸¹ An alternative interpretation of Eph 3:18 has been forwarded by Augustine in his *On Christian Teaching* (Book 2: XL61) (trans. Green 1997:66-67) seeing them as speaking about Christian charity. After equating the dimensions to the Lord's cross, he states 'in the symbol of the cross every Christian act is inscribed: to do good in Christ and to hold fast resolutely to him, to hope for heaven, to avoid profaning the sacraments. If we are purified by such behavior we will be able "to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" [Eph. 3:19]'

⁸² Though direct evidence of the use of paint on Irish crosses is limited, the same 'anistropic' effect can be achieved by staring at a red image on a pale background.

⁸³ From the bible we know that when God appears to man it is generally in the form of light, e.g. the burning bush Ex 3: 2-6 and Eze: 1: 27-28: 'And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake'. God is also described as the source of light (Jas 1:17) or dwelling in light (1Tim 6:16). Jesus is also described in luminary terms (Mt 17:2, Job 37:21, 2Sa 23:4, Job 41:18).

1912: 77)⁸⁴. There appear to be many contributing factors that drive the significance of the crosses with light and its relation to Christ.

Within this context, we can also reevaluate the symbolism and evolution of the bosses. One of the key variations is a more geometric shape such as a rhomb or lozenge. Richardson (1984b: 32) believed that: 'where the lozenge occurs along it seems probable that it stands for Christ, the second person of the Trinity, the Logos'. Richardson cites other examples of its use such as the *chi-rho* page of the *Book of Kells* (f.34r) (Fig. 95), on a book held by St John (f.29lv) (Fig. 94), Symbols of the Four Evangelists, (Fol. 290v) (Fig. 99)⁸⁵. Richardson agrees with Lewis (1980: 150), that the moths on the *chi-rho* page in conjunction with the lozenge are meant to symbolise a *chrysalis* = metamorphosis. Lewis states that they are 'the ultimate source of resurrection, the *Logos* Incarnate'. Edwards (1985: 403) has proposed another interpretation of the meaning of the lozenge. She suggests that it was a more abstract version of the *crux clipeata* (Christ's portrait depicted in a wreath), which stood for the 'Glory of God centring on the Cross' (Stevenson 1982: 2-7). Edwards believes that 'While appearing to retain its symbolic meaning, the portrait of Christ is later replaced by a roundel (alternatively a square or diamond) of abstract ornament'. She cites as examples the diamond at the centre of the St Cuthbert's pectoral cross, f. 26 of the Lindisfarne Gospels, Glamis 2 and the St John's Cross, Iona (Edwards 1985, Pl. IVb).

However, the meaning may be more specific in the context of Christ's resurrection and subsequent transfiguration. It might also be possible to see the use of the lozenge from within the Holy Sepulchre thematic, identified by Roe and Richardson. The use of bosses or lozenges may symbolise the Rock of Calvary (Mt 27:16; Mr 15:46; Mr 16:3); this was the rock that used to seal the entrance to the sepulchre (cave) of Christ. In Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* (Meehan 1958: 47; 3: 25-30) there is a description of the Rock of Calvary: the original rock was split into two parts, the smaller was used as an altar and the larger part 'similarly dressed on all sides, forms another quadrangular altar covered by linens in the eastern part of the same church'. The rectangular nature of the 'altar' would appear to support its symbolic representation as a rhomb. On the High Crosses, when we find a boss on one side and Christ on the other, this could be a symbolic attempt to show his transfiguration or rebirth as a cosmic entity. The rhomb out of this context has also been seen as emblematic of the female

⁸⁴ It is part of the Baptism rite that a sign of the cross is drawn on the neophyte's head with holy water. Holy water has been associated, in Biblical symbolism, with Mary's Birth waters (Krautheimer 1965: 29; Underwood 1950:63). Hence, being baptised is being reborn as a Christian under the symbol of the divine Jesus. These symbolic themes, in other areas detailed in this study, are interrelating and reinforcing.

⁸⁵ This practice of lozenges on the centre of books is also found in the east (see Figs. 96, 97), on the central panel of the Tara Brooch and on the Cross at Moone (Fig. 98), amongst others.

sexual organ (Cirlot 1962: 273). If we consider Christ's transfiguration as a divine rebirth this would be an appropriate shape over the cave⁸⁶. Instead of being symbolic of Christ directly, the lozenge might symbolise the rock behind which the transfiguration occurred. This could explain why moths – instead of another *chrysalis* insect such as a butterfly – were used on the *chi-rho* page, as they would be attracted to the light Christ emits after his transfiguration.

Some depictions in early Christian art that would support this interpretation, e.g. an *ampulla* in Monza Cathedral Treasury shows a small rhomb (lozenge) in front of the sepulchre (Fig. 100) (Underwood 1950: 92; Fig. 42). A stone relief from Dumbarton Oaks collection has the lozenge to the left of the cross (Fig. 101) (Underwood 1950: 92; Fig. 39). The Irish Bell Shrine, *Corp Noamb* from Templecross, Co. Westmeath (Fig. 102) shows a crucified Christ with a large oval crystal that may symbolise the rock of Calvary in a similar fashion (Crawford 1923: Pl X). This arrangement is also found on St Patrick's Bell Shrine around a central cross (Fig. 103).

Edwards (1985: 403) suggestion that the lozenge replaced the portrait of Christ can also be questioned in the light of other contexts of its use. There is a curious central figure on the Killua Shrine, Co Westmeath (Fig. 104), dated to the eighth century based on stylistic similarities to the *Book of Lindisfarne* (Armstrong 1921; Crawford 1923: PL XI). Here we see a figure gripping two beasts with his head compressed into a lozenge shape. This might be taken as a representation of Christ but the scene is also very similar to Daniel scenes found in Ireland. Lucas (1987: 96-97) has cautioned in a discussion of questionable scenes such as this one, that 'it is possible that the two interpretations were not mutually exclusive in the minds of the sculptor and viewers of the High Crosses'. However, the possibility that this might be Daniel with the lions throws into question, on formal iconographic features, the direct association of the lozenge and Christ as a *crux clipeata*.

It is not possible to investigate all the variants of the symbolism of this motif within this study⁸⁷. However, it does seem likely considering the frequent positioning of the crucifixion on one side of

⁸⁶ This imagery and symbolism was present in Ireland at this time. A passage from the *Martyrology of Oengus* (Stokes 1905: 84) states 'On the sixth of the calends of April, after loosing the souls, Jesus – a mighty tale – has arisen out of the womb of the earth'. This directly describes his resurrection as a rebirth from a womb. The discussion above, on Baptism is relevant here as well.

⁸⁷ Another notable explanation of the depiction of bosses has been put forward by Streit (1984: 117-118) who believes that the lozenge in this context was a solar symbol in which Christ was depicted like a sun god. An audience unfamiliar with Christianity might have seen this association. Streit (1984: 116) has also interpreted the appearance of other bosses in a more cosmic context. He suggests that bosses such as that found on the east face of the Duleek Cross display the sun in the centre and that the seven markings could be the planets around the sun. Streit's analysis of the geometric ornament of the west face of the cross at Kilree, Co. Tipperary is shown in Fig. 108.

the cross and a boss on the other that it symbolises the Rock of Calvary in that context. The *Bobbio ampulla*, at Monza also illustrates the clear use of the diamond independent of a ring and in context with the symbolism of the Holy Sepulchre. The identification of the lozenge as the Rock of Calvary would also indirectly support the correlation of the perforated crosshead and the transfiguration symbolism that occurred at the Holy Sepulchre.

SYMBOLISM: ORIGINS IN VISIONS

The last section has indicated that the crosses might have attempted to recreate the light of Christ's transfiguration. There is some literary evidence that Crosses were closely associated with light. Part of the driving force between the adoption and adaptation of the cross forms might have come from literary accounts of religious visions. One of the most significant visions is that of Constantine, of stars in the sky forming a cross has already been discussed; this has similarities to an account in the Bible about the return of Christ. The second coming of Christ will be announced by a cross '...then shall appear the Sign of the Son of Man in Heaven' (Mathew 24:30). Richardson (1984a: 127-128) believes that this is part of the reason for the popularity of the cross forms – heralding the return. In the apocryphal Gospels the moment Christ arose from the dead there issued from his grave, a great cross into the sky: 'they saw again three men come out of the Sepulchre, and two of them sustaining the other, and a cross following after them...reaching unto heaven' (*Gospel of Peter*: 41-42, A.D. 150 or later, trans. James 1953: 90-91). Roe (1965: 220) believes this scene is depicted on the Market Cross at Kells and the West Cross at Monasterboice: 'where, above the entombed body of Christ, a long slender cross rises between the bowed heads of the armed watchers at the sepulchre'. A cross emerging from a stone base would be the very image of an Irish High Cross.

There are more striking examples than the one cited by Roe from the *Apocryphal Gospels*. There is another account of a cross in the sky recorded in a fifth century *Coptic Apocryphal Gospel*. The imagery of a cross is recorded as announcing the birth of Christ: 'Now the star which appeared at Christ's birth was not a star like the others: it was a large star in the form of a wheel, and its shape was like that of a Cross' (trans. Robinson 1896: 162-165) with the letters on it 'This is Jesus the son of God' (trans. James 1953: 147). Also from the *Apocryphal gospels* is an account from the fourth century Latin *Codex Vercellensis* (Matt. iii. 17, trans. James 1953: 33) which recorded a great light shining up from the water when Jesus was baptised⁸⁸. The importance of the connection of light and the cross has been

⁸⁸ As stated above, a wooden cross was erected, on the Jordan River, to mark the location of where Jesus is baptised by John, as detailed in *De Locis Sanctis* (Meehan 1958, 86-87).

discussed above. Significantly, all of these accounts share a common purpose in that they mark a location on the landscape with a cross.

A CROSS ON THE LANDSCAPE: ORIENTATION SYMBOLISM

There is another connection with a long tradition in Roman and eastern practices that has been overlooked by many scholars. These are the urban, geographical and orientation associations that are connected with the cross-in-circle. The motif was used to orientate settlements and demarcate religious and secular boundaries. The Roman usage of the circle-in-cross involved the practice of *augurs* (in ancient Rome a religious official who interpreted omens to guide public policy) in creating an earthly temple. This has been related to the *témenos* or sacred enclosure. This procedure was similar to a surveyor's guidelines. Rykwert describes the process:

It is a starry circle representing the sky which is quartered as the augur quartered his diagrammatic circle. The size of the diagram did not have any relation to its power, since the working was analogical. It worked *ex parvo in magnum*, the divisions and limits of the sky transferred from the little diagram he had drawn into the landscape the augur saw in his *conspicio*... The purpose of drawing the diagram was to set the general order of the sky in a particular place, with the augur at the heart of it. This was accomplished when the great temple of the sky was first condensed into the ideal form of the augur's diagram, and then projected on to the tract of land before him by the ritual formula (1976: 47).

A miniature from the sixth-century *Corpus Agrimensorum*, f36, 23 (Fig. 157) shows a cross within a starry ring in a wreath design. Rykwert (1976: 51) also has an example of a *stele* of the agrimensor *Lucius Aebutius Faustus* from Ivrea, Piedmonte (Fig. 158) that has surveyor's symbols very similar to some of the *chi-rho* patterns associated with Constantine's symbol. This can be compared to a *stele* from Armant (Fig. 159), where a similar architecture encloses a *chi-rho* symbol. The long tradition of using the cross-in-circle, to signify a settlement or town, might indicate that the origins of this device might be found in the east and developed by the Romans (1976: 192-193)⁸⁹. If we recall the battle of Constantine, cited above, the *chi-rho* was a sign from God that helped him win the battle, but the

⁸⁹ Eliade (1959: 47) describes this Roman device as a *mundas*, which was a circular trench divided into four parts. He links this to the cross-cultural tradition of using the establishment of an orientation point as the equivalent of recreating the 'our' world (1959: 22-26, 31; 1958: 372-382) following the paradigmatic model of the gods recreating the universe. The purpose of this is to orientate 'religious man' in his environment. The *mundas* operates as an *imago mundi* 'assimilating it to the *cosmos* by the projection of the four horizons from a symbolic point' (1959:47); the *mundas* represents a symbolic microcosm of the universe (1958: 379). This orientation can be achieved either by the depiction of these cardinal points or by the establishment of an *axis mundi*, themes that will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters in relation to the crosses and their contextual use.

reason for the battle was to build Constantinople. The symbol was later adopted as the symbol for the capital of new Rome. The symbol was not only Christ's victory on the cross, it was also signified Constantine's founding of the new Christian capital.

Rykwert (1976: 194-196) believes that 'many medieval princes, or at any rate their literate advisers, knew of the antique traditions about town-founding and town-planning...In Europe, the Etrusco-Roman usages were so firmly part of men's imagination, that they were adapted to both civic and church uses: the ceremony of consecrating a church and an altar according to the Latin rite are both marked by them'. While we might expect that Roman traditions might not be as strong in Ireland as in Europe there is no reason to discount their usage. We should also bear in mind that Irish monasteries were round in form⁹⁰.

We shall discuss below the strong influence of monastic tradition from Coptic studies. Specific to this discussion there is a hieroglyph from Egypt called *nywt* ⊗ (Budge 1971: 34; Watterson 1993: 135) that means 'village, town, city'. Rykwert (1976: 192) illustrates this character *nywt* as a vertical cross ⊕. The *chi-rho* ⊕ is at least superficially similar to this character. Considering the importance of cardinal orientation, that will be demonstrated in this study; to the spiritual architecture at this time, it is possible that the *chi-rho* inherited some of this symbolism as the Holy City. Another reason for a reorientation of the *nywt* character might have been the use of the *chi* symbol by itself to symbolise Christ in Irish art (Ó Carragáin 1989: 18, 24). There might have been a desire to differentiate Christ, the True Cross and Holy City. This association will be discussed in more detail below.

CONCLUSION

⁹⁰ Notably, the seventh-century *Synodus Hibernensis* indicates that a *termon* (Irish sacred area) should be marked by a cross (Wasserschleben 1885, trans. MacLean 1995: 145, footnote 175). This indicates that a similar cross within boundary tradition was practiced in Ireland reflecting this broader orientation heritage. It is important to recognize that the spatial marker of the circle, as boundary, was as important as cross in this symbolism. This is illustrated in an account from the *Life of St Ailbe*, a 'pre-patrician' saint who possibly died in the second quarter of the sixth century (trans. De Paor 1993:227), where it recounts: 'And each day when St Ailbe when into the City, where he was studying with Hilary, and drew on the earth with his crozier around the swine; and the swine didn't dare to cross the line traced by the crozier – nor could the thieves or wild beasts harm them' (1993:230; my emphasis). The presence of a High cross in such a context is supported by the quotation cited above about the first use of the descriptor High Cross: Under the year AD 957 it states: 'The *Termon* of Ciarain was burned this year, from the *High Cross to the Sinainn*, both corn and mills' (O'Donovan 1851: Vol. II: 677, my emphasis). The High Cross functions symbolically is a marker of this boundary and symbolically representative of the *termon* in this context.

This chapter has sought to provide an overview of scholarly research on the High Crosses from the perspective of this study. These studies into the Irish High Crosses have been largely focused around two axes: explorations into the origins and evolution of its form and explanations of this unique development and morphology from a symbolic perspective. This discussion has outlined the key theories that investigate the development of the High Cross from the perspective of possible eastern influences. With the aim of explaining why the early Irish church would develop this particular form of monument. These studies indicate that technical development of the cross was closely linked to the symbolism, not only the cross form, but also the structural elements that appear to, as a composite, have had a specific frame of reference – the monuments at the Holy Sepulchre.

The beginning of this monumental Irish tradition appears to have commenced with the building of wooden crosses. The origins of this practice are unclear but it is likely that this was a practice that was shared within the Ireland, Iona and North England regions. It is important to recognise that erecting pillars and crosses had a widespread practice on the continent and the east; additionally, there was a preceding non-Christian tradition of standing stones in Ireland. What appears to have made the early Irish tradition distinct is the scale and complexity of these crosses. The starting point of this tradition are obscure but Iona appears to have been the site of experimentation with early forms and pivotal to the transfer to a stone media. However, while evidence points to this activity centred at Iona, it is likely that there was some collaboration in this development within the immediate region that included Irish and Pictish artists. Northumbrian crosses while inspired by the same practice appear to have developed concurrently with different considerations driving their evolution. Some of the features that differentiate the English crosses have been touched on in this chapter and will be explored in more detail in this continuing study.

The presence of skeuomorphic features from wood working techniques, such as the mortise and tenon joints, indicate that initially the stone versions were modelled directly on wooden crosses. However, there is also no reason to assume that the development of a stone form of monumental cross led to the immediate decline of the wooden tradition. The presence of skeuomorphic elements in the construction of the stone crosses help to explain to some extent the rapid development of their form. It is also likely that these early artists also looked to metal crosses, or metal-covered wooden crosses, for inspiration. There is some evidence of experimentation from both these traditions: features found on the Ahenny Crosses have been identified as composite of wooden and metal working techniques. While many of these developments appear to be an inheritance from skeuomorphic prototypes in wood and metal it does not appear that the High Crosses were intended to be facsimiles in stone of these forms. The early faithfulness to the details of the original models

was gradually replaced by experimentation with the skeuomorphic features: the bosses, carvings, bases, capstones and others features all show signs of artistic evolution. It is clear that the artists experimented and developed on the vestigial features and evolved both their artistic and symbolic forms. This represents a shift from facsimiles of an actual cross to the form of crosses, symbolising and evoking structures at a location – possibly a moment.

While we see experimentation with the cross forms the symbolic evolution of the cross elements appears to have consolidated - for the High Crosses - around cross symbolism related to the Holy Sepulchre. The main symbolic association of the High Cross relate back to the pivotal moment in Christianity – the crucifixion. There appears to have been a consistent attempt to replicate the features of the structures at Jerusalem. However, it is unlikely there would have been one definitive guide and different crosses emphasis different features in their execution. This might have been because they copied different models – visual, written or oral - or that the creators saw different priorities. The variation in depictions and factors that affected their construction will be discussed in more detail over the following chapters.

This discussion has also sought to identify the meaning of the cross form by investigating the symbolism of the cross. This has involved attempting to disambiguate the meanings associated with this choice of cross form. Considering the breadth and variety of inscribed cross symbols in Ireland at this time, the identification of the symbol or model for the High Cross form is problematic. However, the identification of the composite morphological elements of the High Cross with the architectural structures found at the Holy Sepulchre, by Roe and Richardson, are persuasive in explaining their consistency and constancy. This study has argued that while the cross and stepped base can be linked back to the Holy Sepulchre, it might be possible to question the identification of the capstones as part of this theme. The use of the capstones on the more developed High Crosses lend themselves more to a local symbolic purpose, than as a structure that can be explicitly linked to the Holy Sepulchre. Since the capstones are unique to Ireland this might suggested that they were a local development. While Richardson has been able to find examples of similar structures in appearance on the top of some eastern pillars, these lack the developed form of the Irish examples. Additionally, the context that we find the High Crosses in, with founders' tombs and the role and connection between pilgrimage and crosses, it is more likely that they might be symbolic of local saints' tomb or a skeuomorphic representation of a reliquary. Considering the similarities between the gable-roofed capstones with gable-roofed shaped reliquaries and tombs it appears more likely that these were the models. That foreign designs and architectural forms influenced the reliquary shapes is not in debate. Awareness that these in turn were miniature models of architectural

buildings might have led to the experimentation and development of the Irish domed capstone based on local Irish church architecture in the form of a *clochán*. This interpretation would add to the possible role of High Crosses and cross-slabs in founder's tomb traditions in Ireland. The importance of differentiating the likely models of the capstones will be discussed further in the last chapter of this study. The role of High Crosses in relation to the local saints will be explored more fully over the following chapters.

A notable limitation to Richardson's identification of the High Cross form with the Holy Sepulchre is that it does not explain the ringed form of the High Cross as an integral part of this theme. This study has attempted to develop Roe's association of this form with the halo of an *imago clipeata* representation further. This has involved a proposal that the perforated ringed cross, found in the more developed High Crosses, was an attempt to illustrate the transfiguration or divinity of Christ. The development of a perforated form coincides with the replacing of the skeuomorphic boss, at the intersection of the transom and shaft, with a depiction of Christ. Edwards (1985) had suggested that the boss was a symbolic form of Christ in a *crux clipeata* but this identification can be challenged by placing the evolving boss form within the thematic of Holy Sepulchre symbolism. If we accept the interpretative context of the High Cross as a representation of the Holy Sepulchre, a possible explanation for the perforated ring (halo), was to show the *ego sum lux*. While not a consistent development on some crosses, one side shows the mortal Christ and the other side a geometric boss symbolic of the Rock of Calvary. The affect of the light through the perforated ringed crosshead might be an attempt to illustrate Christ in his divine form.

While the elements of the High Cross form: the stepped base, the cross and questionably the capstone can be explained by the Holy Sepulchre thematic, any identification has to take into contemporary associations with the cross symbol. The investigation of the cross-in-circle symbol has many distinct and interrelated interpretations at this time. Many of these symbols are found in hybrid forms. To date, scholarly interpretation of the ringed cross form is divided between seeing it either as a variation of a victory garland or the *chi-rho* motif of Constantine. Other related symbolism such as the *flabellum*, and its role in early Church ritual and pilgrimages, should be considered. In particular the relationship that the *flabellum* in different executions, has to the *chi-rho* and degenerate cross-in-arcs motifs, which also have connections to pilgrimage routes, indicating some commonality of message.

This study has argued that a stronger connection in the role of the cross-in-circle symbol as an orientation marker on the landscape should be considered as bridging different type of associated

symbolism. All three of the primary identifications of the ringed cross form can be linked back to the landscape: the *chi-rho* as a symbol of Constantine's city; the *flabellum* as a witness of a journey; and the cross of arcs as a marker of the pilgrimage journey. Additionally, Christ in a *crux clipeata* depiction can be seen as a representation of him at the centre of the cosmos defined by cardinal axis. There is also an established Roman tradition that demonstrates the integral role that the cross-in-circle played at this time in orientating any settlement on the landscape. This might explain why these symbols share similar depictions and sometime appear as hybrids.

While symbolic considerations might have guided the shape of the cross the development of the cross form raises other questions. How this architectural form was created in such a short period of time. Who were the artists responsible for creating these crosses and what was the division of labour – input into the content of the cross? Why were they built over other media choices and what role did they play? Who was meant to see the crosses? These issues shall be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE HIGH CROSS: FORMS AND TECHNIQUES

The last chapter investigated the defining features of the High Cross form and the symbolism that motivated this distinctive tradition. This chapter is concerned with how this construction was implemented and who was responsible for their production. Many factors contribute to our understanding of what makes a High Cross unique. As an artefact, it marks a significant departure from the earlier technical traditions within the broader group of Irish standing stones. The evolution of the cross appears to have had an eclectic technical background and the source and origins of these techniques remain unclear. To establish an understanding of what was being constructed, and how, an investigation of the context of where this new tradition evolved from is needed; what new features made it distinct; where the impetus for this radical departure originated from; additionally, who was responsible for implementing the changes. All of these factors have an impact on our understanding of the High Cross as both a public artefact and how they functioned as a communicator. This role was dynamic as the crosses mediated and represented relationships between the Church and the secular spheres and considerations of both groups warrant investigation.

THE IRISH HIGH CROSS: AN INNOVATION FROM TRADITION

A significant difference between the High Cross and earlier (contemporary) cross-slabs and pillars is the scale of their construction. This larger size appears to have facilitated – or was driven by – a departure from standing stones performing primarily as funerary markers to a more public role as a ‘centre of recitation’ (Henry 1965: 118). Corresponding with this change in roles was a more prominent profile within early Christian settlements¹. There were also structural changes that reflect this changing role. The High Crosses were the first standing stones to be decorated on all sides allowing for a 360° viewing of the cross. They also incorporate a consistent design that appears predicated on the symbolic grounds of the base, shaft and ringed crosshead, discussed in the preceding chapter. While the primary purpose of monument was as a symbol of Christ – through its form – another key purpose was as a communications medium: a public billboard for Christian messages.

The impetus behind these changes reflects both the evolution and sophistication of the medium and the needs of the communicated message. This was achieved primarily through the innovative use of

¹ Herity (1984: 108-110) believes that the placing of crosses such as the Cross of the Scriptures (c. 900 AD) in a prominent public location, the *platea*, was a significant move by the church.

panels to display discrete scenes and the adoption of plastic style carving instead of continuing incised art traditions. This use of a plastic art style of execution allowed for the development of a figurative and more naturalistic art style. As shall be discussed, there is clear evidence that the thematic decoration of the High Crosses utilised these panels to aid in their subjects' coherence. The other obvious change is its development as a public display for Christian messages. Earlier public announcements or messages would have been made orally and as a result were temporally and functionally restrictive. This is not to say that all High Crosses had highly developed communication themes; however, it is likely that they had greater capacity to communicate when compared to the early-Christian cross-slabs. It is also possible to identify regional preferences², intended messages and target audiences of the crosses. The broader context and likely messages of what was being communicated will be discussed in detail in a later chapter. It is useful to establish an understanding of the medium in terms of what it was capable of communicating from a technical perspective. This facilitates a clearer understanding of the nature of the communication; specifically, how it evolved relative to the limitations and opportunities of the medium.

CROSS PANELS: NATURE OF THE DECORATION

The High Cross was a communication vehicle that presented information figuratively for the first time, incorporating the innovative use of panels. The new form of plastic figurative and aniconic ornament is a dramatic departure from the sketched and incised decoration on slabs that occur in stone before the introduction of the Irish High Crosses. The origins of both the decoration and technology are still undetermined. This is important to understand because the source of the techniques for this shift in technology can reflect whom the artists were and if there were any pre-existing associations for this type of plastic ornament.

Henry (1965: 148) has suggested that the inspiration for decorative iconography reached Ireland in the form of paintings and ivory. Other media that support plastic moulding are glass, amber, bone, ivory, leather, clay or metalwork. Harbison claims that changes must have originated from one of three materials: wood, terracotta or stucco (1992: 327-328). He is most in favour of stucco panels, suggesting that these could have been imported and then attached to the wooden crosses, as has been suggested above for metal panels in relation to the Ahenny Cross. These would have later been

² Henry (1965: 134) has pointed out that the choice of ornament can be used to differentiate English from Irish crosses. Irish crosses tend to be decorated with spirals, interlacing and insular patterns, while the English crosses used vine scrolls inhabited with animals as decorations. James (1999) states that there are fewer than ten surviving examples of vinescroll from Ireland or Wales and none of the Welsh examples are 'inhabited'. However, there were shared motifs within the region as has been discussed.

translated into stone with the rest of the cross. The plastic moulding of stucco would have trained the artists in both perspective and carving before the advent of sculptured stone. The problem with this theory is that there are no Irish examples of stucco art, although Harbison is able to cite continental examples. There is also no evidence to support Harbison's claim that stucco panels were attached to wooden crosses. Neither is there any reason why stucco could not be applied to the wooden crosses. As discussed in the previous chapter, it has also been claimed that the skeuomorphic double mouldings on the Ahenny crosses were used to hold decorative panels in place (Henry 1965: 140; Harbison 1992: 348; Richardson 1994: 105). There would have been advantages to this device: new panels for teaching could have been changed on a regular basis and organised to be more in the line of sight as the need arose.

CROSS PANELS: PAINTED DECORATION?

One of the ways that the viewing of the panels could have been accentuated was through the application of colour. However, there is no direct evidence that Irish crosses were painted. Henry (1965: 123) suggested that:

on all these monuments there is very little more than engraving, than the transcription on to a stone surface of the essential outlines of a painted image. It is indeed extremely likely that touches of paint came as a complement to these schematic designs which would then become the exact equivalents on a more resistant support, of an icon painted on wood. Their stone-plank appearances come only as a confirmation of this general impression (1965: 123).

Hamlin (1994: 191) has come to a similar conclusion believing that Irish artists had a *horror vacui* and that the plain or blank surfaces of the Blackwater River crosses were most likely painted. This may provide an explanation for the blank panels that have been interpreted as unfinished³. Considering the weathering that most of the High Crosses and slabs exhibit, it is not surprising that it has been difficult to find paint pigments. It is also unlikely that this sort of analysis has been applied to every cross at this time.

While no trace elements of pigments have been found on Irish crosses, there are examples on Anglo-Saxon crosses (Stalley 1996: 13; Harbison 1992: 351; McGuire and Clark 1987: 44). It is worth noting that some Coptic stone crosses of this period were painted, e.g. a small Coptic memorial stone

³ There are other possible interpretations besides an unfinished or work panel: in Hindu art blank panels represented the supreme void (Napier 1992: xv). This raises the possibility that a blank panel has a symbolic reference that we do not understand.

from Badari, A.D. fifth - sixth century, has a looped cross within a circular wreath and still shows sign of paint (Badawy 1978: 211, Fig. 3.214). This inter-regional use of paint would suggest the likelihood that colour was used on some Irish High Crosses.

If we look to other Irish structures of the time, we find that these are decorated with paintings and other decorations. Karkov states of an Irish church:

‘The description of the church at Kildare from Cogitosus’s seventh century Life of St Brigit is exceptional. The church was adorned with painted tablets (*pictus tabulatis*). A wooden wall divided the east of the church from the nave. This wall had a door at either end and was hung with linen curtains and decorated with paintings (*unus paries, decoratus et imaginibus depictis, ac lintheaminibus tectus*). It might be seen as comparable to the chancel arches of later Romanesque stone churches as its function was seen as largely the same’ (1991: 30)

Additionally, the seventh-century law tract *Cáin Fhuithirbe* states: ‘High king... it is for God that he has adorned the church’ (trans. Breatnach 1984: 48-49). This tract gives us the impression that the church would have been colourful, considering the Celtic love of colour in other media. Wooden churches are also described as being decorated in the Saint’s Lives (Murray 1979: 88-89). The churches at Hexham and Jarrow are both described as having coloured wall-plaster and windows of plain and coloured glass⁴. While there is no evidence linking this technique to Irish crosses, a similar approach could have been used. We know that the polychrome effect was common in other media in the eighth century (Ryan 1992: 138)⁵.

CROSS PANELS: LAYOUT AND CONSISTENCY

One of the notable features of the figurative and aniconic art found on High Crosses is the precision – and in some cases consistency – of the layout of their depiction. While there is a considerable differentiation in High Cross form, around the central symbolism discussed above, there appears to be more constancy in depictions. The most likely explanation for this is that there were either traveling workshops (artists) involved in cross decoration or some form of templates were being circulated. Roe (1965: 80) suggested the use of ‘pattern books’ which were used as templates for designs. For example, the decoration of the Castledermot Cross has been seen as a ‘discrete set of

⁴ Bede reports of Benedict after a return from Rome ‘He bought back paintings of the life of Our Lord for the chapel of the Holy Mother of God which he had built within the main monastery, setting them, as its crowning glory, all the way round the walls’ (trans. Webb 1983: 189)

⁵ It is also possible that smaller models were acting as the impetus for colour, e.g. liturgical crosses of the eighth century were colour-coded, red wood for Palm Sunday and crystal for *Paschaltide* (Smith 1975: 31).

scenes' which might be derived in part from the Durrow Cross and the Scripture crosses (Herity 1987a: 118). Alternatively, the Castledermot Cross might have had a similar source to these other crosses. McGuire and Clark (1987: 44) have shown 'that almost identical designs were being made on crosses at different sites, and this suggests that there were workshops that were selling their work, or that there might be itinerant sculptors moving about sometimes carrying with them templates from which the designs were formed'. The problem with this, as identified by Harbison (1992: 327), is that none of these pattern books exists today. However, the introduction of naturalistic forms and figure sculpture that were foreign to pre-Christian Irish culture and the quasi-uniformity of depictions would suggest their adoption from common sources.

The use of pattern books can be deduced from other artefacts. Ryan's study of the Derrynaflan paten indicates the use of pattern books. In discussing the letter marks he states that 'given the use of letter code on the Derrynaflan paten, it is tempting to postulate the existence in eighth and ninth century Ireland, not alone of pattern books for the design of objects but also of a technical manual embodying perhaps both the mature and late classical technology' (1992: 145). The idea of the artist being literate is an important consideration in terms of the decoration and purpose of artefacts. This is an area that will be discussed in more detail below in relation to the intended message of the cross decorations.

The use of pattern books might not have been limited to a visual template. Stokes (1894: 12) draws attention to the *Book of Ballymote* which contains instructions as to how Christ and his apostles should be depicted, suggesting this was similar in function to Byzantine 'Painters' Guides'. It is possible that the highly differentiated nature of the depictions on the cross panels reflects different artistic interpretations of a written guide, not a visual one⁶. Therefore, it is possible that the same scene found in Ireland and Britain might appear different because they are following different literary sources for the same event. While the characters might be recognisable, from formal characteristics of the narrative, different aspects of their total stories were depicted differently because of the source material⁷.

This issue of different sources can also be illustrated at a local level in Ireland. If we look at the Arboe Cross, Co. Tyrone (Fig. 170) and the Clones Cross, Co. Monaghan (Fig. 168) they appear to be morphologically very similar. They are also located in adjacent counties so it would be logical to

⁶ However, there is clear evidence that, in some cases, images were marked up from a common visual source.

⁷ For example, 'Irish readers seem indeed to have known more than one version of the meeting of St Anthony and St Paul. But it seems unlikely that only Greek versions of the life of St Paul were read in Ireland, or that St Jerome's Latin *Vita* was only read in Northumbria' (Ó Carragáin 1989: 39).

assume that the artists shared techniques. However, if we look at the east and south-east faces we can see that the same three scenes are depicted with very different details (Figs 171, 172). These differences might be because of a number of reasons: different artists could be executing different styles, they could have been made by different generations of artists, one cross could be a copy of the other or different artists were making personal interpretations of written or oral guidelines.

CROSS PANELS: TEMPLATES & GRIDS

These new techniques and systems of representation required the development of new skills. Before looking at the origins of these new techniques, it is useful to review what we know of the skills that were used. This is important when we consider the role of the artist in choosing the subject matter that was represented. The skills that were developed reflect the new Christian need for figurative representations.

The origins of these skills might have originated from those that were already in use by other media. It is possible that some of these skills were transferred from gospels or 'copy books' using techniques similar to the way in which they were laid out⁸. It is possible some incised crosses in stone were copied from illuminated manuscripts (Lionard 1960: 98; Harbison 1992: 131-134)⁹. Geometric depictions found on different media seem to demonstrate the use of similar techniques in their creation. The main tools used appear to have been the use of grids and compasses. We know that grids (Van Stone 1994) and complex geometry utilising compasses were employed on Irish manuscripts, see Fig. 173 (Henry 1965: 215-224; Stevick 1994)¹⁰. They were also used in metalwork, as Kilbride-Jones (1990: 306-307, Fig. 8) believes that the St Patrick's Bell was designed utilising a grid: 'designed specifically for repetitive work in squares and rectangles and right angles'¹¹; another example are the Donore Discs, Co. Meath (Ryan 1994). A waxed tablet such as the one found at Springmount Bog, Co. Antrim, dating to the sixth or seventh century could also be a temporary source of designs (Macalister 1920; Hamlin 1982b: 286). This would indicate that there were some similarities (familiarity) in the approaches and techniques used across different media.

⁸ One possible source for this could be pocket gospels that were easily transmittable (Lewis 1980: 141).

⁹ Harbison has identified two possible direct transfers from a gospel page to stone: on the west shaft of a cross-shaft at Kilnaruane, Co. Cork (1992: 131-132) and on the south head of the sandstone cross at Kilree, Co. Kilkenny (1992: 133-134).

¹⁰ Henry (1965: 215-224) has identified the use of grids with compass work to create patterns on bone slips from Lough Crew in various constructions from the *Lindisfarne Gospel* (Plates 102, 104); and in the outlines of the symbol of St John in the *Echternach Gospel* (pl. V).

¹¹ This was used to create the distinctive cross and *swastika* pattern (Figs 51, 52).

It is likely that common stone working techniques of using physical straps were used, arranged in patterns with hole-points, to construct the depictions while being carved (Adcock 1978). While there are no surviving pattern books, there is physical evidence of the grid layout of scenes from crosses (Lang 1986: 153). The scribe lines technique was developed to facilitate the scaling-up of drawings from pattern books. Due to the scale and cost of stonework, this use of grids has been identified as adding more confidence to the execution (Lang 1986: 159). Bailey (1978: 180-85, 1980: 242-54) has developed a detailed system of analysis of the construction templates for figure representations. He has been able to identify specific similar elements of design within the depiction of figures in different media of this time. Lang (1986: 154), developing Bailey's analysis, has analysed a Sockburn portrait and has suggested that the entire portrait constructed to a one-inch grid. This one-inch grid analysis has been applied to both the North and South High Crosses at Castledermot¹². Other examples are on the Cross of Scriptures, which Lang believes 'maintains the symmetry as well as employing a surprisingly fine degree of measure for a large monument' (1986: 156).

The use of grids was not exclusively restricted to figurative decoration and is utilised in geometric designs of High Crosses as well. Edwards (1983: 9-10) has determined that the entire cross head of the Ahenny North is carefully constructed on a horizontal/vertical grid of squares used to incorporate the use of 'C' and 'S' spirals (Fig. 31). There is evidence that geometric designs were used to layout the designs of cross heads. St John's Cross, Iona, appears to have been crafted with the use of compasses and grids (Fig. 174). Kelly (1996) has discussed the geometric layout of Irish crossheads in detail. This technique was not exclusive to Irish Crosses. There is evidence that grid patterns were used to layout and scale up designs on Anglo-Saxon crosses (McGuire and Clark 1987: 44); there are visible scribe lines (preliminary guides for the decoration were scratched into the material before commencing carving) for the circles on the designs. The grid technique is also found in Scottish art (Lang 1986: 158): the Kirk Andreas slab from Bullion, Invergowrie, in Angus, has decorations based on a diagonal grid¹³. Lang describes this use in Scotland as 'surprising'. He (1986: 155) points out that the use of grids is not found in other areas such as Scandinavia. This may imply that the technology had been introduced along with Christianity¹⁴.

¹² Discussing the depiction of the Daniel and the Lions scene on the Castledermot North Cross, Lang says that 'its inner moulding is one inch wide and the internal panel measurements conform to exact multiples of an inch' (1986: 155). Additionally, Gelly (1994: 160-161) has identified the use of a grid for the Adam and Eve panel on the Durrow cross, which is 18 inches by 18 inches long. The figures are 12 inches tall with 3-inch working divisions of knees, waists, noses and tops of heads.

¹³ Furthermore, Cramp (1984: p1, 152, 797) identified several British stones with scratched grids on their surfaces, e.g. a late coffin lid from Monkwearmouth, Durham.

¹⁴ It should be recalled that ornament of the preceding *La Tène* Celtic period also utilised compasses for decorations. It is possible that some Christian-period art could have borrowed from local knowledge. The Turoe Stone, Co. Galway (Fig. 175) dating from the last few centuries BC (Harbison 1988: 158-159) shows

CROSS PANELS: SPECIALISED TOOLS & EXPERTISE

The principal tools would have been leather straps, drills and compasses¹⁵. MacGuire and Clarke (1987: 44) have identified the use of tools on English crosses: 'a range of tools was used for the carving - punches, chisels and drills, all made of iron, and other tools for rubbing down and moulding the rounded surfaces'. This would suggest to some extent that the choice of stonework was dictated by the quality of the tools, which might have had to evolve alongside the crosses. These would have been used to mark and navigate grids that appear to have largely conformed to a one-inch scale. The technique discussed above was probably already refined before the construction of the High Crosses, present in both stone and other art forms such as manuscripts and metalwork, and was adopted once the decoration of the crosses became more elaborate. An advantage to the use of grids would be to allow a 'master craftsman' more freedom to delegate work, once the designs were established to his satisfaction. In all arts, there is a difference between being able to perform (play music) and being able to design (make music). The existence of master craftsmen is likely when the full range of decorations is taken into account, as shall be discussed below.

The decoration and construction of any one cross may have been the work of more than one artist. The unfinished East-Cross at Kells also shows signs of being decorated after construction (Crawford 1926: 1-10; Henry 1967: 151-152; Harbison 1992: 352). Robertson (1975: 116, 119) in discussing attempts to reconstruct the St John's Cross, Iona, describes the cross as being erected first and then being completed by two artists working simultaneously¹⁶. Alternatively, Stalley (1996: 13) has proposed that detailed carvings were done on-site close to where the High Cross was constructed; the stone lying on the ground while it was decorated. There is no reason that both processes could not have been employed at different sites. It is notable that the difficulties of moving the High Crosses, as indicated by the efforts needed to move the St Patrick's Cross, Co. Tipperary (Lynch

curves and patterns that would have needed a compass. Duignan (1976: 201-217) suggests that these four parts were copied from other shapes, which would have involved using a grid to transfer the design onto stone (Fig. 176). Similar compass derived patterns have been discussed on bone artefacts found at Lough Crew, Co. Meath (Crawford 1925). Kilbride-Jones (1989) has discussed the possible identification of Celtic Art patterns on inscribed grave-slabs at Carrowntemple, Co. Sligo. However, Mytum (1992: 70) warns that 'Christian art at this period shows very little evidence of any indigenous *La Tène* influence, and this cannot be mere accident'.

¹⁵ There is a passage from a story relating to *Cúchulainn* and the 'Courting of Emer': 'Mac Enge saw the man coming over the outer wall to him again, and a fork in his hand, and it having two prongs. And he put one of the prongs in the ashes, and with the other he made the pattern that was to be cut on on *Cúchulainn's* shield. And so *Cúchulainn* got it, and the name it had was *Dubhan*, the Black one' (Booss 1986: 388-389). This suggests that some of these techniques would have been familiar before the introduction of Christianity.

¹⁶ It is possible that artists specialised in different types of work within this process (Harbison 1992: 253).

1983), indicate that the construction of the crosses may have been a public display, whereas other forms of Irish art would have been produced in closed workshops¹⁷.

ORIGINS OF THE NEW TECHNIQUES

As this discussion demonstrates, the Irish High Crosses incorporate some technology that was not in evidence before the introduction of Christianity and is unlikely to be an entirely indigenous development. Two scenarios can be used to account for the introduction of technology. In the first, we can prove archaeologically an influx of foreign artefacts that could have functioned as templates or stimulus material. These could have been from the continent and largely from Anglo-Saxon regions (Mytum 1992: 220). The strong connections between Ireland and Iona, Pictish and Northumbrian art have been noted. It is also likely that foreign artefacts, such as textiles or icons, would have come through the western seaboard of Europe from the Mediterranean and the East. These new skills could have been 'inspired' or 'copied from imports'; new techniques reverse engineered from final products. These could have been transferred in any of a number of media: metal, wood, glass or clay. Ryan (1992: 145) believes that it is not necessary to postulate actual imports of Byzantine vessels into Ireland - the dissemination of patterns and written guidance, perhaps through the medium of monasteries such as Bobbio, could have sufficed. However, there is evidence of contact with the Eastern Mediterranean that could account for this, as shall be discussed in the concluding chapter of this study.

There is also the question of how long these new skills would take to master and whether this was long enough for the development of a new tradition of monument (Fisher 1994: 43). Up until the seventh century trade was not very well developed and visits by clerics and pilgrimages accounted for almost all direct contact. After the seventh century, there was an increase in trade with the east¹⁸. Ireland was not the only region that was being exposed to eastern material. It has been suggested that the Christian artists at Northumbria emulated Mediterranean models of figure representation (Kitzinger 1940) and that the Viking Oseberg figures were influenced by eastern designs (Marstrander 1965: 144). These foreign sources were not indiscriminately employed. Mowbray (1936: 440), for instance, has identified eastern styles imitated in both style and subject of the decorations

¹⁷ This public process might have had an impact on their interpretation as public communicators. This element of their construction will be discussed in more detail below.

¹⁸ This could have been in the form of any easily portable relics such as books, pictures, reliquaries or instruments (Badawy 1978: 362). Gauthier (1983) provides a catalogue of non-Irish relics and a discussion of routes to and from Jerusalem. As the cult of relics demonstrated, almost anything could be given special significance, 'reverence', and become a source of inspiration as a motivation for their wide distribution in the archaeological record.

on the St Andrews and Nigg crosses. He does not believe that the eastern influence is evident on any of the other extant Scottish slabs. This indicates either that a particular artist was deliberately emulating an eastern style, against the fashion and traditions of his day, or that there was another factor at work.

This leads us to another possibility: were there foreign artists in Ireland and/or Britain? As Link (1995: 57) says,

Yet even today we are reminded that the "Dark Ages" is merely a metaphor and that monasteries preserved learning carefully. What learning? Such ignorance must give us pause: how could cathedrals have been built? In addition to the practical skills of craftsmen, foreign architects were employed.

While we are not concerned with cathedrals, it would be difficult to attribute the sudden emergence of complex artistic accomplishments such as the Irish High Crosses in a culture recently out of the Iron Age. Over a 200-year period, the standing stones tradition culminates in complex architectural forms and symbolism with sophisticated figurative decorations. Though many scholars accept that the artists who worked on High Crosses might have been part-time, it is difficult to explain where they learnt and refined their skills. A part-time vocation would hardly fit in with the production period.

If the crosses were not the products of 'experts', where did these new skills originate? Henry (1965: 133) was of the belief that the presence of eastern artists in Ireland would not have been surprising. She attributes this to the 'iconoclastic quarrel' that had turned the role of the painter or sculptor in the Byzantine Empire at that time into a 'dangerous occupation'. Following the Iconoclastic controversy in Byzantium (725-843), some of the ablest artists and monks set out seeking a new creative life in Western Europe (Badawy 1978: 362). The rapid development of arts in the west would seem to support the case that these artisans had found new markets for employment of their skills. Notably, these new techniques might have been taught to insular artists and it is feasible that non-Irish artists were practicing their arts within Ireland at the same time.

The possibility that foreign artists were at work in the early Christian period raises the question of the control of form and decoration of the Irish High Crosses. There are accounts of foreign artists working in Britain¹⁹. Benedict Biscop and Wilfred used continental masons and craftsmen to

¹⁹ Henry cites evidence of the vine patterns such as those found on the Ruthwell cross as evidence of Mediterranean influences (1965: 133).

develop their churches in Northumbria in the seventh century. Bede records the dispatch of skilled Northumbrian masons, *architectos*, to the southern Pictish area to help enhance the church there (EH:V. xxi, trans. Colgraves and Mynors 1969: 553). In another example, Bede records that Benedict brought masons and glaziers back with him from Rome (trans. Webb 1983: 189)²⁰. Additionally, De Paor (1993: 35) has suggested that as early as the end of the fifth century craftsmen and scholars were migrating from Gaul in order to avoid the conflict there. Artists did not come exclusively from the Continental church. There is a gilt bronze buckle, from Finglesham, Kent, grave 95, which might have been the work of a travelling jeweller from 'Dark Age' Sweden (Hawkes 1965: 22; PL IV). Travelling craftsmen could explain the 'random' occurrences of eastern styles through the insular region. This would provide an explanation of how eastern traditions and technology were so quickly assimilated into the Irish artistic vocabularies and techniques.

The extent of the influence of these foreign artists has been challenged by Mason (1942: 132), who states, 'the number of instances where Greek or Coptic influences are seen in manuscripts and on our early inscribed stones, not merely in the treatment of the subject but in the subject itself, would seem to point to a derivation from a direct contact and not through an intermediary'. He goes on to argue that Irish craftsmen made the Irish High Crosses, not foreigners. His evidence for this is the treatment of the Temptation of St Anthony the Egyptian where he claims that 'early Irish artists were not so realistic: they were more symbolical'. While this is a consideration, there is no reason why a 'foreign' artist could not adapt to a new audience or even work in conjunction with a local artist.

²⁰ From the *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow* Bede states 'Benedict crossed the sea to France to look for masons to build him a stone church in the Roman style he had always loved so much' and 'When the building was nearing completion he sent his agents across to France to bring over glaziers – craftsmen yet unknown in Britain – to glaze the windows in the body of the church and in the chapels and clerestory' (trans. Webb 1983: 189).

THE ARTISTS: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THEM?

Artefacts from the archaeological record reflect their role within the complex context in which we find them. They can also provide us with valuable insights into their creators. As has been clarified by Vastokas:

Every manufactured object has a life and a life-history of its own. In the process of its production, whether by hand or machine, the artefact is born, stamped with the conscious intentions and unconscious expressions of its creator(s). Then the artefact lives out a life in time and space of greater or lesser duration, both as a meaningful and expressive object in itself, and as a ritual performer in social and cultural life. Finally, it dies, passes out of use, destroyed or deposited in the garbage dump or in a museum (1994: 341).

Through archaeology, we are in the process of reconstructing the meaning and purpose of artefacts. The starting point is to understand the context of these artefacts. At a basic level, this involves four participants: the creator (s), the artefact (product), the user(s) and the context. In order to gain an understanding of how the Irish High Crosses 'performed' within early Christian Irish society we have to first investigate the 'conscious intentions and unconscious expressions of its creator(s)'.

As discussed above, there were two sorts of freestanding monuments: the High Crosses and the freestanding slabs. It has been suggested that the cross-slabs were the efforts of 'less' skillful artists (Mytum 1992: 239-240). This proposition raises several important questions:

- What set of skills defined a skilled artist?
- What defines the cutoff point in practice between these two schools of artists?
- Were lesser and greater artisans organised as Mytum has suggested on monumental morphology?
- Did artists work in more than one medium?
- Was one artist responsible for a standing monument or many?
- If many, how was the work subdivided?
- Who coordinated this work?
- Was artistic expression separated from meaning and function?
- Who were the target audiences?

These questions can to some extent be dealt with by looking at the crosses from within their socio-cultural context.

The actual creators of the High Cross monuments are still unidentified. The current image we have derives from a combination of literary evidence and some information gleaned from the crosses themselves. It is useful to separate the construction of the crosses from the sculptural decoration of the panels. This distinction has not received a lot of scholarly attention; the skills of a decorative artist are not necessarily compatible with those of the constructing mason. Nor are the skills of someone inscribing a geometric pattern necessarily compatible with plastic figurative stone ornament. The complexity of the High Crosses, when compared to the more 'simple' slabs, appears similar to our current definitions of professional artists opposed to folk artists. It has been suggested that there is a split in art production within cultures between 'folk' art and 'intellectual' art²¹. It is unknown to what extent early medieval Ireland made a similar division of skills. Clearly, the later Irish High Crosses represent a technical apex of stone working skills in the early medieval period but this does not automatically mean that other more 'simple' executions, such as a simple incised cross on an amorphous stone slab, were below these artists. However, Lionard (1960: 145) thinks that a distinctly different group of artists worked on slabs from those artists of the High Crosses. He reaches this conclusion based on the total lack of animal interlace or spirals on the slabs: 'these two patterns call for more than mere routine skills, which may explain their scarcity on what is, after all, a type of production not calling for the work of creative artists'. Yet, as will be discussed below, there are numerous examples where crosses have shown signs of mistakes or misrepresentations. This might be evidence of a learning process or a distinction between technical skill and understanding or the subject.

ARTISTS: SCULPTOR VS DECORATOR

The relationship between the cross form creator and the decorator is a difficult one to disambiguate. Edwards (1983: 6), in discussing the Ahenny group, says that 'the sculptor does not merely display his repertoire upon a monumental cross, but rather the layout is completely dictated by that form and is designed to fulfill particular functions in relation to it'. This can be illustrated by looking at some of the figures carved on cross heads, which are squashed or bunched together. Were sculptors

²¹ This division has been studied by M'Closkey (1994), who, interested in academic perceptions of Navajo art, makes the point that 'fine art becomes primarily an intellectual exercise whereas the essence of craft production resides in the technical excellence of the completed piece' (1994: 394). Contrary to this view, in a study of Boston gravestones Mayer (1979: 5) has questioned whether there can be a direct comparison between the skills of a folk artist and those of a trained artist.

different craftsmen from the decorators or is this a reflection of the artists' inexperience? There is both archaeological and literary evidence of a division of labour.

From the material record, several examples suggest both that apprentices worked on crosses and that mistakes were made. There is a panel on the east side of the Bealin Cross, Co. Westmeath where the depiction of zoomorphic figures 'throws the interlacing wrong' (Crawford 1927: 2). On the cross head from Killesher, Co. Fermanagh, the cross form and mouldings appear confident but the figure work demonstrates less skill (Hamlin 1980: 53-54). The crucifixion scene on the east face of the North Cross, Aran, Co. Galway has a depiction of Stephaton and Longinus where it appears they are not depicted with their usual spear and sponge, to make room for the symmetrical patterning in the adjoining panels (Waddell 1981: 34). Another example is at Errigal Keeroge, Co. Tyrone, where a solid cross has one armpit that shows the commencement of a perforated design. Additionally, Brindley (1988: 49-50) states that because the sides of the shaft at Selloo, Co. Monaghan (late eighth century to early ninth century) were unfinished they 'might have been abandoned because of an error in design'. Alternatively, Stalley (1996: 11) believes that, because of the quality of the stone, the artist decided not to continue the design²². There are many more examples than listed here but these examples do build an impression that errors might happen at each stage of the crosses' preparation.

The use of a marigold pattern on the Kilkieran West Cross has been identified as the work of an apprentice (Roe 1962: 40). The marigold pattern is a simple geometric compass pattern when compared to the complex fret, spiral and interlace patterns, making it unlikely that a skilled artist would have incised a motif this simple. While common on slabs, this motif is rarely found on High Crosses. It is possible that more skilled craftsmen trained slab craftsmen on lesser works. This distinction between slab and High Cross craftsmen is highlighted by Kilbride-Jones' survey of the *Chorcha Dhuibhne* crosses, Co. Kerry, where there are no slabs with examples of interlace, an ornamental device that is common on almost all High Crosses (1986: 7). He says that this is because the stone carvers were never practitioners of this art form or because the slabs were inscribed prior to the introduction of interlacing²³. While there would appear to be a division between slab and cross decoration, it would be strange, considering the time needed to learn new skills, if slab artists, familiar with work in stone were not conscripted to work on the High Crosses. What the *Chorcha Dhuibhne* survey does illustrate is that the diffusion of stone working technologies was not uniform

²² However, discussed above, it is possible that blank panels were decorated in other ways and if this is correct, they may not indicate an incomplete cross.

²³ He ignores the possibility that interlacing might have been rejected either based on the overall cross composition or symbolic grounds.

across Ireland and that the variations found in cross form and decoration might be the product of gaps in knowledge or the products of centres of local genius.

Another possibility is that the motif might have been a request of the person(s) commissioning it and not part of the artisan's repertoire. It is conceivable that some less confident executions are the result of innovation. In discussing insular manuscripts, Heslop (1986: 1) says that 'while it is possible that, in producing them, the illuminators were working to instructions from learned advisers, it is simpler to infer that some artists took the initiative themselves, read the adjacent text and devoted some time to devising an appropriate image'. However, as we have copybooks, the use of a scribe who copied only images without comprehending the meaning cannot be discounted. The extent of sculptors' comprehension has been questioned because of the often confusing placement of iconography panels. Henry (1967: 147) believed that it would 'be futile to assign any reason to the resulting incoherence other than the ineptitude of the sculptor or of his patron'. Therefore, a workshop's collective competence has to be evaluated on both the technical ability of the artists and their comprehension of the subject matter. The latter might not have been an issue to an early church where audience and clergy might not have been up to continental standards. Another possibility is that the clergy was not directly involved in the creation of the crosses, which affected quality control.

If we accept the premise that a perfect cross was not created every time, then it might be that the surviving crosses were the finer examples. The evolution of these monuments could have only been achieved within a corresponding cultural evolution of the idea and technology behind them. The Irish standing stones at a common level tend to share basic decorative and morphological similarities²⁴. Difficult images probably reflect more the gaps in our knowledge than evidence of folk artists practicing in stone. In a society where an artist represented an 'opportunity cost', in which subsistence had to be provided to the artist from the community or an individual, it is unlikely that folk-art would have been practised on the level that we find standing stones. It is more likely that masters and artists-in-training made pillars and High Crosses.

ARTISTS: WERE THERE FORMAL WORKSHOPS?

²⁴ Because there is no definitive chronology of the standing-stones, it is difficult to establish whether slabs were produced concurrently with Irish High Crosses or at other times. However, we do know the more simple forms and cross-slabs of larger size and complexity created between AD 500 and AD 800 (Mytum 1992: 213).

There is some evidence that there were defined relationships between master artists and apprentices in what could be called workshops. There is limited evidence of craft organisation prior to 900 A.D. (Ryan 1988: 36). Ryan (1991: 119) has suggested that some craftsmen, in particular metal workers, were travellers but that monastic craftsmen might have been tied to particular monasteries. We know from law tracts that artists were freemen. Douglas MacLean (1995) has investigated the social status and relationship of artists in early Irish society through an exploration of an Old-Irish legal tract *Uraicecht Beac*. The original text for this document dates the eighth-to-ninth centuries²⁵. These legal tracts indicate that a craftsman, or wright, who was responsible for the creation of a cross was called a *sáer* and were dependent professionals under the law (1995: 128-129). The law texts also recognise a chief master craftsman (1995: 134) and identifies different levels of competency with grades for engravers or relief carvers (1995: 135-136). MacLean interprets that there were three basic grades of artists: masters, adult assistants with independent legal standing as commoners and dependent apprentices (1995:137). Questionably, in terms of formal workshops, MacLean references the *Teaching of Máel Rúain*²⁶ that states that masters do not like their pupils to get instruction from other masters; which he takes evidence of a formal professional relationship. MacLean (1995:143) raises other questions: where they learned the trade²⁷ and the precise nature of the clients and patrons. However, he notes the royal connection to the artist *Colmán* and two High Crosses, West Cross of Clonmacnois and the cross of Kinnity, both apparently made by the same artist, which sheds lights on both the patrons and artist²⁸.

However, MacLean's interpretation of the relationships from these legal tracts does raise some questions. From an evolutionary perspective of the crosses, the rigid suggested hierarchy does not fully account for the cross-fertilisation of skills that we find in the material record at this time. Although, considering that monastic centres and royal sites were centres of industry (Warner 1988:66), this might account to some extent for the sharing of skills detailed earlier in this study. Additionally, these legal grades do not give an indication of what sets of skills an individual typically held in combination and how these were employed. Furthermore, whether technical competence

²⁵ MacLean (1995: 126-127) provides a scholarly overview behind the chronology that he has adopted for the law tracts.

²⁶ MacLean (1995:138) cites a maxim from a seventeenth century version of a lost ninth-century original document of *The Sayings of Máel Rúain*, abbot of Tallaght who died in 792A.D.

²⁷ An interpretation made by MacLean (1995:154) regarding the nature of the artists is there was a shift from those that worked in wood to stone. While not implausible, it does revisit questions about not just where these new skills were learnt but also how they were developed in a new medium over such a short time period. The *Uraicecht Beac* itself (1995: 135) does not specifically mention any crafts worked in stone. Another question he raises is our lack of understanding of the tools employed, which has been covered earlier in this chapter.

²⁸ MacLean provides a detailed discussion of the artist who appears to have made crosses for two generations of *Clann Cholmáin* branch of the southern *Ui Néill*. This has also been discussed by de Paor (1987), Henry (1980: 44-45), Ó Murchadha (1980), Ó Murchadha and Murchú (1988: 66) and Harbison (1999).

was linked to education in other areas – in regards to the direction and understanding of iconographic decorations. They also do not indicate the nationality of the artists or account for possibility of itinerant artist working alongside those with legal standing. They do however, provide a valuable insight into the relative social status of artists (MacLean 1995:143) and the established order of working under a master and a system of apprenticeship.

The legal tracts give the impression of the relative social structure of the cross makers to other professional classes. However, the interaction between master, artist and patron is still unclear. This means the control over the materials and organization of this tradition remains uncertain. Ryan (1991: 119) makes the point that we do not know if they were paid or if they controlled the raw materials; speculating, however, that they worked in 'entirely controlled environments'. A 'controlled environment' would suggest some type of formal workshop. This might have been the case once the form and method of the High Cross were established, but there is little evidence for this earlier on. We do find groups of crosses that share morphological characteristics within geographical areas²⁹. However, this might just as well reflect either a similar training or similar purpose behind construction. Mytum (1992: 241-242) has suggested that the construction of the standing-stones revolves around the monasteries where they became centres of craft expertise. While this is likely towards the end of the early Christian period, it does not explain earlier crosses, before the monasteries were fully integrated into Irish society and economy.

Alternatively, Schapiro (1944: 173) in investigating the Anglo-Saxon Ruthwell Cross has linked the erection of any such monument to a broader community effort³⁰. While it makes more sense for a publicly viewed monument to be seen as the product of a community and its church, this does not explain where the technical skills for such a composition come from and what level of input the artisan had in the creation. If the cross were a community effort then it would be to some extent representative of the community. Secular itinerant craftsmen could have been hired on commission to erect these monuments. This could possibly place the execution and creative process outside of the direct control of the church.

²⁹ Hicks (1980: 29) believes that distinctive regional groups can be defined, 'not only in Ireland but also in Scotland and northern England during the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries'. Also for regional groups, see cross types Data 25, 27, 29, 33, 34, 41, 44 and shaft types Data 61, 65.

³⁰ 'The erection of such a cross cannot have been the work of individual hermits or of a group of monks living in isolation in a wilderness. It may celebrate the desert and the anchorite, but it is a product of power and monumental purpose. It represents the effort of a community, an organised church that thinks of its relations to the surrounding people in the present and the future; the eremitic imagery of the cross is a collective religious conception, not the fantasy of a single anchorite who lives on the margin of the church. That is why the content of the cross must be understood in terms of local institutions; whatever may have been the role of individuals in shaping particular forms' (1944: 173).

Irish stone sculpture appears to have characteristics in common with the techniques and some designs used in Egyptian masonry. A comparison between this new Irish tradition and the substantially more established Egyptian practices is useful. Baines (1985: 6) makes the point that 'In an art like that of Egypt, where styles and schemata change slowly and artists work in groups, almost all their attention must be focused on reproducing existing schemata and absorbing the influence of existing works'. The Irish High Crosses, if they had workshops, do not appear to display the same characteristics of continuity. Taking into account that the Irish stone working techniques were in their infancy, compared to the centuries during which Egypt perfected its techniques, one would expect a more uniform result in the crosses if there were workshops between different groups of crosses. While the Irish High Crosses share key symbolic morphological characteristics - the base, shaft and ringed head - there was no one common form for any of these separate elements. Even the 'latest' crosses seem to show evidence of continued experimentation in form and decoration that reflects the work of a master artisan more than the evolving knowledge of a workshop or broader tradition. While the High Crosses have common elements there does not appear to have been a common template. This is not to say that a temporary workshop could not have made a series of crosses. They could have shared a common source as a template or the same lineage (master and/or apprentice) might have worked on the crosses. A master craftsman could have inspired and taught apprentices on an *ad hoc* basis or there could have been workshops responsible for regions³¹. What is not clear is whether there was a division of labour with particular skills within a team working on different stages of the construction of the cross or how coordinated these teams were. While the law tracts recognise a division of skills, it is possible that one master craftsman, with a composite of skills, was responsible for a whole cross. Problems with the co-ordination of iconography and its meanings have been discussed.

The most obvious groups of crosses that show signs of common traditions are at Clonmacnois, Ahenny and Iona (Edwards 1986: 23). However, the early crosses at Iona show few of the signs of the coordinated construction that the later crosses display. The RCAHMS (1982) survey found no evidence for a 'permanent school' of professional carvers at Iona. While there are construction elements that group these crosses³², the Iona crosses were carved in an unsympathetic material and showed other signs of what might be called an immature art (Fisher 1994: 42) or have been seen as experimental (Stevenson 1956: 89; RCAHMS 1982: 18). Fisher (1994: 43) has suggested that because

³¹ For example, on the Caher Island slabs, Herity (1995: 127) thought that 'the influence of one or a number of individual innovative sculptors creating distinctive themes can be perceived in the collection'.

³² Crosses can also be classified by similarities in their plastic and inscribed decoration, e.g. voluted trumpet spirals (lotus buds) are found on all six of the Iona crosses (MacLean 1986: 18; Kilbride-Jones 1980: 40-5).

of the absence of panels on the Iona crosses this might mean that Pictish slab artists were brought in for the work. However, because of the varied nature of the crosses, it is unlikely that the influences from outside 'experts' were ever dominant; this view is supported by Hamlin (1994: 193-195).

Amongst the Irish crosses, several possible workshops have been identified, although Henry (1965: 138) believed that the only sculptor's workshop that could be linked clearly to an important centre was that of Clonmacnois. Ó Floinn (1994) has been able to identify an inscribed cross type that is specific to the Clonmacnois workshop (Figs 166, 167). These crosses have been seen as sufficiently close in style to High Crosses at Durrow and Monasterboice to assume that the workshop travelled extensively in the region (Stalley 1996: 37). The Barrow group (late ninth century to late tenth century) was probably the product of a common workshop (Kelly 1986: 65-66). Kelly bases this determination on their morphological similarities and the fact that they are clustered within six miles of each other³³. De Paor (1987: 151-156) has produced a detailed study that investigates morphological, iconography and epigraphic evidence to conclude that the *Tech Theille* Cross, Co. Offaly, and Kinnitty Cross, Co. Offaly, were made by a common workshop within one generation.

While we can speculate on the existence of workshops it is certain that the extant corpus of stone crosses did not all originate from 'established' backgrounds. If we question the presence of artists in collective groups, the other option is that they were more freelance in nature. Henry (1965: 132) proposed that the transformation of the stone plank slab or cut-out cross into an articulated monument 'may perhaps be due to a stimulus from outside and to the teaching of a few wandering craftsmen'. The likelihood of 'groups or guilds of travelling workers moving from abbey to abbey' was supported by Roe (1956: 80) and de Paor (1987: 144-150)³⁴. Hamlin (1994: 193-195), however, has been critical of this view, arguing for a stronger local influence, a claim based on the differentiation of cross form and decoration from different sites. Groups of artists cannot explain the differentiation in cross morphology discussed above because the resulting cross could be expected to be more uniform. It is also possible that that travelling workers 'fixing' scenes to local needs would explain this differentiation of decoration (Harbison 1992: 329). This can be resolved by identifying characteristics particular to artists or workshops. This approach will be discussed below. A question that immediately arises is what criteria the local artist or patron used to make decisions on the choice of scenes.

³³ The physical proximity of crosses is not always a good indicator of relationships as was discussed above.

³⁴ The evidence cited above of the connection to the artist Colmán and two High Crosses, West Cross of Clonmacnois and the Cross of Kinnitty, both apparently made by the same artist, indicates that artists did travel from site to site on one occasion (de Paor 1987: 143; MacLean 1995: 141-142; Harbison 1999)

CLERICS AS CRAFTSMEN

We know that in the medieval period the status of the worker made a difference to how the art was received. Grigg (1977: 25) has claimed that some cult images were made by craftsmen of low social status and that these artefacts were not suitable for the elite. There is evidence that the clerics who were involved in the constructions were often from noble families³⁵. There are two examples of craftsmen that are directly associated with Irish crosses. One of these is named on the Tuam Cathedral fragment as a craftsman - an individual named *Delgany* (Higgitt 1986: 129). There is also a grave slab at Clonmacnois, Co. Offaly, inscribed 'pray for *Thuathal the craftsman*' (Stalley 1996: 21, Pl.5b). The placement of their names in this context would indicate that they were part of a monastery and that being a craftsman was not seen as an inferior trade. However, there is no clear indication that the 'craftsman' signifies the person(s) that constructed or decorated the cross. While we know that some artisans were of high status, their role in such new public art might have been different. The role of the artist in creating the cross could have been a socially minor one and some other person or the community as a whole might take credit for the end product³⁶.

Mytum (1992: 212-213) believes, on economic grounds, that clerics were also craftsmen. Pointing out that monasteries could not afford to have large groups of tradesmen working together at the same time, he notes that there does not appear to have been any stigma in a cleric being a craftsman because this art was aimed at a common ideological end, 'the greater glory of God'. However, what is not clear is how 'religious' these clerics would have been. By the seventh century, it is clear that not everyone who lived within monastic settlements or on monastic property could be classed as 'religious' (Doherty 1985: 55). For this reason, the term *manach* (from Latin *monachus*, originally 'a monk') comes to mean simply 'monastic tenant'. There is evidence, to be discussed below, that wealthy and royal families sponsored monasteries; so costs might not have been a consideration. The second part of Mytum's (1992: 212-213) identification is more convincing: 'the Ardagh and Derrynaflan chalices were in both cases symbolic and complex... the complex symbolism was more

³⁵ The uniformity of cross morphology and the techniques necessary to build the Irish High Crosses indicate that this was not a casual project. The materials necessary to build the cross also indicate that these constructions were taken very seriously and would have need wealthy patronage. The Southern *Uí Néill* dynasty of the *Clann Cholmáin* kings probably funded the development of the Scripture Crosses (Ó Floinn 1994: 251; de Paor 1987: 143; MacLean 1995: 141-142; Harbison 1999). Furthermore, the *Uraicecht Beac* law tracts indicated that a 'chief master wright' hand an honour price the equivalent of a 'chief master poet' which entitled the 'legal protection and honour-price of the king of a single *tuath*' (MacLean 1995: 147). However, it should be recalled that there were other grades of artisans and we have no way of definitely associating crosses with the legal grade of their creator.

³⁶ An extreme illustration of this can be taken from ethnographic evidence. The Yoruba of Nigeria when assessing their art pay little attention to the artist and judge the pieces of art independently; once finished, the role of the artist has ended (Napier 1992: 29).

than one would expect from craftsmen'. However, this does not automatically make the cleric 'the craftsman'. Clerics could have been the coordinators of the work; responsible for the design e.g. the chalice and not necessarily the execution of its creation (Ó Floinn 1994: 251; Hicks 1980: 9). This might again illustrate the division between so-called folk art and professional art discussed above.

Mytum (1992: 236-340) has addressed the possibility that each monastery could have had part-time artisans rather than full-time workshops. The mortality rate and the need for funerary workers may not have warranted a full-time position in the production of cross-slabs (this is assuming that cross-slabs were used to mark graves exclusively). He believes that full-time artists performed the more complex tasks but that a part-time artist might have performed more simple works. In a recent thesis, James (1999) has studied the ornament of the Ruthwell Cross. A statistical analysis of the ornament has illustrated differences in the panels: 'the lower stone of the Ruthwell Cross was sculptured by two different artists or teams from different backgrounds working at more or less the same time' (1999: 64-65); 'detailed study of the sculpture and inscriptions indicates that the Ruthwell cross is the work of two teams of sculptors. The east and north faces appear to be the work of the sculptor with more formal and conventional training, while the west and south faces appear to have been made by a sculptor whose training and competence allowed more freedom in execution' (1999: 124). She also suggests that this might reflect seasonal teams working on the cross when the light was better (1999: 64-65). While James' study does not focus on Irish sculpture, there is no reason not to expect a similar division of labour on Irish crosses.

Another consideration is that any one clerical craftsman could have worked in different media, just as artists might have done (Roe 1965: 80; Edwards 1983: 31; O'Meadhra 1987b: 99-100). If that were the case, we could expect artists who worked in metal, for example, also to work on illuminated manuscripts³⁷. Though the skills required for masonry are very different from those of metal work (Lionard 1960), we can still expect some sharing of skills and techniques³⁸. There are similarities between the execution of interlace figures on crosses and the *Book of Kells* (Bourke 1986: 119). Interlace figures are also found in metalwork, e.g. the Togherstown Brooch (Macalister and Praeger 1931, PL3). Any division of skills indicates specialisation and this would require more than a part-time commitment. There is some evidence of specific medium specialisation: as Hicks (1980: 29) notes, 'metalworking was carried out at both monastic and secular sites, whereas the production of manuscripts was the work of monastic scriptoria only'.

³⁷ It has also been noted that without literacy an artist may not necessarily develop the visio-spatial skills needed for detailed representations (Ingold 1993: 312).

³⁸ It is possible that common sources for the technical processes in a wide variety of media have not survived (de Paor 1987: 143).

There is no clear indication of which medium 'clerical artisans' would have worked in. We know that during the time the Irish High Crosses were being built stone buildings and churches of increasing complexity were being erected (Harbison 1970: 49; Hamlin 1984: 119). A mason who worked on the building of a church would have been more able to construct a cross or an altar (Durant 1960: 135), whereas a stone panel carver might have more in common with a motif carver, wood carver or even metalworker. This is not to say that artists at this time were unable to perform various tasks; but while they shared techniques and motifs between different artistic media, there is no evidence of a specific artist working across media. This might explain the similarities of carved decoration across different crosses compared to their architectural form. There would have been a more experienced workforce with carving experience rather than construction skills especially during the eighth and ninth centuries when stone churches were rare (Harbison 1970: 49; Hamlin 1984: 119).

This possible division of skills in the construction of crosses can be illustrated on some crosses. There are examples where some work in stone decoration is inferior in execution to its construction, e.g. the figure carving on the Monasterboice cross has been seen as flat and simple, lacking modelling, whereas the cross form and mouldings appear confident. Hamlin (1980: 54) has suggested that the artist might not have been proficient at figure sculpture, citing a cross fragment from Killesher, Co. Fermanagh (Hamlin 1980: Pl. 1A), where the figure is 'lacking sophisticated modelling'. The other possibility is that there was a division of labour. As discussed, there is some evidence that different media were used for training prior to their use on more expensive materials, such as on motif pieces of bone (O'Meadhra 1987a: 159-165; 1987b; Ó Ríordáin 1947b: 113) (Fig. 177). This suggests there were *different types* of artists for the different decorations of the one cross.

It would not be unreasonable under these circumstances to assume that there would have been a director of such a project. The concept of a director raises several problems. Higgitt (1986: 126) notes the first of these: 'there is no way of telling how many of the stone-cutters were actively literate and how many were simply good copyists, although a seriously garbled text might well be attributable to an illiterate craftsman'. He points out that, 'There may in fact be no clear-cut examples of such illiteracy on the insular inscribed crosses'. In numerous examples, the decorations of crosses are reflections of misunderstanding of the Bible in either the chronology of scenes or placement. Additionally, considering the complexity of the symbolic meaning associated with aniconic decorations there could be errors that we do not perceive.

Stalley comes to an interesting conclusion regarding the difference between the decoration of crosses and gospel books:

Most noticeable, however, is the fact that the Christian iconography on the crosses draws on a completely different set of images from those found in the gospels books. This of course reflects the very different functions of sculpture and illumination: one intimately related to text and reserved for an exclusive audience; the other a public declaration of Christian beliefs (1994: 261).

If we accept Stalley's summary of the respective iconographies, the decoration of crosses does not have to be executed by a literate artist. Crosses could be decorated from copybooks as discussed above and themes coordinated by the monastery elite.

Schapiro also makes this point in discussing painted images of the time:

The painter and sculptor had the task of translating the word - religious, historical, or poetic - into a visual image. It is true that many artists did not consult the text but copied existing illustrations either closely or with some change. But for us today, the illegibility of that copy, as of the original, rests finally on its correspondence to a known text through the recognisable forms of the pictured objects and actions signified by the words. The picture, we assume further, corresponds to the concept or memory image associated with the words. The correspondence of word and picture is often problematic and may be surprisingly vague. In old printed Bibles, the same woodcut was used sometimes to illustrate different subjects (e.g. birth scenes) (1973: 9).

If artists were illiterate, they were not necessarily also uneducated. Schapiro (1973: 11) points out that, 'If some illustrations of a text are extreme reductions of a complex narrative - a mere emblem of the story - others enlarge the text, adding details, figures and a setting not given in the written source. Sometimes the text itself is not specific enough to determine a picture, even in the barest form.' For example, the Book of Genesis does not indicate what weapon is used by Cain to kill Abel, but a jaw-bone is commonly depicted. If Schapiro is right, the depictions might not only be misinterpreted but also skewed, once reinterpreted, for the local audience. Issues relating to communication and interpretation will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

It is also important to bear in mind that early Christian works of art were probably created by artists working for both a Christian and a non-Christian clientele (Kitzinger 1940: 3). We can assume that wealthy nobles commissioned the crosses and, once they became economically viable, by monasteries. This does not mean that we have a clear understanding of the target audience of the Irish High Crosses. It is likely that slab carving used a much greater socio-economic base of workers than is recorded in the annals (Swift 1994: 248). This would reinforce the idea that the crosses are

markers of wealth³⁹. The effect is that these standing stones would have become very visible markers of prestige, wealth and the elite. This patronage might also be expressed on the bases of crosses that show secular themes including hunting scenes (Data 180). Doherty has identified another example: 'That some of the gift objects are not merely luxuries but also symbols of authority can be seen in the frequent references to horns in poetry as a symbol of kingship. They are also depicted on the high-crosses, particularly clearly on the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnois' (1980: 74) (see Data 179)⁴⁰. These would have appealed to the aristocracy and reinforced their place within social discourse. The use of crosses as a communication medium to reinforce the cultural and social hierarchy will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on detailing the technical development of the High Crosses to gain insights, through an understanding of their evolution of how they were created and into why they were constructed. There appear to have been several factors that were driving the evolution of the cross form and decoration. This investigation of the technical evolution of the High Cross form has indicated that there are two dimensions that need to be considered:

1. the development of the physical form of the High Cross and the role that symbolism plays;
2. Its development as a communication medium – a public canvas for complex messages.

This discussion has detailed the technical changes that were implemented in order to facilitate the changing communication needs of the early Irish Church. There are several questions that are prevalent: what is the nature of the technical innovations (what makes High Crosses distinct from other standing stones), what advantages do they facilitate, who were the creators – in terms of direction and execution, and does this allow us any insights into the likely audience for the crosses?

³⁹ Mytum (1992: 49) saw the control of craftsmen by the elite as a statement in itself: 'by limiting production, output was demonstrably valuable and reinforced the existing hierarchical social order through display of prestigious material culture'. The links between royalty and some High Crosses has been discussed at the beginning of this study. Furthermore, expressions of wealth – such as commissioning crosses – might have had a definitive social role. In Irish society, being a king was a combination of being from the right family and having the necessary wealth (honour price) to be king (Warner 1988:61). Overt statements of wealth such as a cross would reinforce perceptions that this honour price was maintainable. Furthermore, as shall be discussed over the following chapters, the church and the crosses worked to support the non-financial perceptions of the right to rule within social discourse.

⁴⁰ As an ethnographic comparison to the Irish hunting scenes Taylor (1987: 131), in analysing the iconography of Thracian hunting scenes, states that 'at the iconic level, we may assume that the style ... was created in order directly to reflect the image of the elite...the basic structure of the iconography revolves around the predator/prey dichotomy, and the association of horse and men with the former group'.

From a technical perspective there are several key features that set the High Crosses apart from the preceding standing stone traditions: their size and scale, that they can be viewed from all sides, their use of a consistent cross form (that frames their message content and interpretation), the innovative use of panels to coordinate a visual message and the development of plastic ornament so that more complex messages could be communicated: iconic, aniconic and epigraphic depictions. These features all show evidence of experimentation and refinement over time, culminating in the development of the Scriptural High Crosses.

In terms of their 'decorative' content, the ornament of the High Cross marks a departure from the non-Christian practice of incised depictions. The evolution of the High Cross form coincides with the use of a developed plastic ornament and a departure from the incised and low relief carvings found on cross-slabs. This development facilitated (or perhaps was driven by) requirements for more complex figurative imagery. It is possible that paint was used to highlight and further define these images. These developments would have involved some tool specialisation and the use of grids for layouts. Evidential marks of the techniques that were used indicate that pattern or copy books might have been used. This might explain why we find similarities between the depictions of scenes on different crosses. However, differentiation between these scenes might be the result of the artist's execution of a simple layout or following written or verbal instructions. The final product resulting from the utilisation of these visual and structural techniques marks the development of a complex public communication medium, which makes these early Christian monuments unique.

What is not clear is who the creators of the monuments were. It is likely, considering the rapid development of this class of monument, that there were foreign influences involved in their technical development. These might have taken several forms, coming from imported models, written instructions or directly from visiting foreign artists. However, it is clear that there is no indication of a dominant non-Irish nature to any of the surviving High Crosses. This suggests that regardless of the origins of these techniques, their creation was tailored to local needs, requirements and expression. Understanding who controlled this process is more problematic. This study has suggested that it is most likely that there was a division of the creation process among three groups: a director (who might have been one of the stone workers), sculptors or masons responsible for constructing the physical form of the cross and decorators who were responsible for the decoration of the cross surface (this might have involved further specialisation into figurative and aniconic artists).

This suggests some degree of specialisation in the production process that the number of surviving crosses makes it hard to substantiate. The idea of formal workshops is unlikely but there were probably centres of craft expertise for periods; most likely this was centred around master artisans. It is also likely there was some cross-fertilisation of techniques between artists practising in different media. Masons could have been part-time workers on High Crosses; also working on cross-slabs and in the developing architectural traditions in Ireland. While there is some evidence for clusters of crosses sharing either morphological or ornamental similarities there does not appear to be any evidence of a sharing of skills uniformly across the island. However, it is also not unreasonable to assume some limited movement of artists to other parts of Ireland. Groups of crosses, such as at Clonmacnois or the Barrow Group, were most likely constructed by a team headed by a dominant mason. This picture does not necessarily translate into established workshops producing High Crosses.

In terms of who these artists were, it is likely that they were within the sphere of monastic influence. However, it is unclear if they were clerics themselves or monastic tenants. Such a clarification would be important to our understanding of the second dimension, detailed above, relating to the development of the High Crosses because it speaks to the extent of control over medium content and message expression. To what level the artists were educated, literate and had input into their art we do not know. There is conflicting evidence from the crosses themselves, with some crosses showing errors on simple scenes and others showing a sophisticated degree of coordination of iconographic themes. The more sophisticated crosses suggest that a more detailed direction of the work occurred by the master artist or project director. To presuppose that the crosses had a highly organised and codified content for a specific audience means that the director of these High Crosses must have actively supervised the content or was an artist himself. It also reduced the importance of guidebooks in their construction because such coordination of decorative content moves it from ornament to images of a more spiritual/educational/advertising purpose.

However, this can only be understood by investigating the other party in the communication equation – the audience. Who were they? What were their communication needs? What do we know of the non-Christian associations with the medium? Were the crosses aimed at one audience or did they have different messages for different audiences? What innovations were employed to facilitate understanding by these audiences? What was the stage (context) where the High Cross was viewed? How did this affect the message in terms of how it was read? Did the High Crosses have other uses within this context? The role of patrons, clerics and the intended audience – religious and secular – is the focus of the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONTEXT OF HIGH CROSS CONSTRUCTION

The previous chapter identified the technological distinctiveness of the High Crosses and sought to identify the nature of the artists that worked on this new class of monument. These factors both influenced message comprehension and expression. There are two other participant groups in the creation of the Irish High Crosses: the patrons and the audience. It is assumed that 'patrons' were also part of the audience of the crosses. It is conceivable that the patron in part, coordinated the messages the audience saw rather than just funding the enterprise. Who were the patrons of the crosses? What was the message that they were trying to convey and why? Any understanding of the motivations and identity of the patron(s) of the High Crosses has to start with an understanding of the early Irish Church and its role in Irish society at this time as a context for their development.

The introduction of Christianity into Ireland did not establish a belief system within a void. Religion, besides its spiritual nature, evolves alongside the complexities of social and cultural organisations. The material artefacts that support a religion will be relative to that of its culture. Religion as a system started with simple goals, explaining the unexplainable and unpredictable¹. Religion facilitates social order and to some extent cultural evolution. 'One of the functions of religion is to explain the real and unreal world, ordering and validating community experience in terms of its own explanation' (Hulin 1989: 91). Religious and social systems are mutually reinforcing and the diffusion of a religion often copies that of the secular authority. At the time of the introduction of Christianity Ireland was experiencing a population expansion and increasing competition for resources (Mitchell 1976: 171). As strains develop between social groups under changing economic conditions, religion and ritual can become an important mechanism for facilitating acceptance between groups (Hodder 1979: 450), and Christianity served this function in early Ireland.

PRE-CHRISTIAN BELIEF SYSTEM

In order to understand the nature of Irish Christianity we need first to understand what it replaced. What we know of the pre-Christian belief system in Ireland is limited; because, it was the product of a primarily oral culture that did not place an emphasis on the use of material objects for its administration or practice. What we do know derives from the writings of Christian clerics who

¹ 'Mankind carries with it a tremendous inheritance of terror. Before being a religious animal, man was a fearful animal' (Garcon and Vinchon 1930: 10).

recorded the beliefs and 'stories' of the Irish Celts centuries later. The early Christian church was able to effectively arrest the pre-Christian belief system by writing it down over the first 300 years².

The details that were written down by clerics for whom there was no incentive to explore the earlier religion further, so the nature of the Celtic religion was not recorded in any depth (Mytum 1992: 53). Part of this process has been summarised by Ladner: 'The pagan gods of myth could be tolerated by identifying them with heroes - in euphemistic historicisation - or with cosmic phenomena - especially in astrology - or with universal ideas - personified in allegories of moral or generally philosophical-religious scope' (1983: 248-9). One of the effects of this reinterpretation of religious material into mythological cycles was to obscure many of the complex relationships underlying the religion (MacCana 1970: 61). The broader effects of fixing an oral tradition in stone shall be described in more detail below.

One of the most noticeable characteristics of these processed accounts of Celtic myth is that there was a constant search for the Roman equivalent within its pantheon. Sensational details are emphasised and there was an attempt to find parallels with pantheno-centric descriptions of belief systems. It is not clear, however, whether the Celts had similar divisions and if their notion of a deity is comparable to that of the Greek and Romans (Sjoestedt 1940: 2). Sjoestedt goes on:

When they describe the ancient gods as prehistoric tribes who once laboured and fought upon the soil of Ireland, and still dwell there invisibly present, side by side with the human inhabitants, there is a great temptation to see in this notion, for which there is an analogy in various primitive mythologies, the result of a secondary process of euhemerisation, or confusion between the gods and the fairies of the dead. I believe that we should not dismiss lightly the evidence of the texts. Those who composed them were indeed Christians, but only a few generations separated them from paganism.

She brings up a very important issue for the current study: when did the non-Christian belief system end?

The non-Christian belief system in Ireland may have shared common characteristics with other European cultures in the region, which involved a split between the greater gods of fertility and power on the one hand, and local gods on the other. Worship was centred in sacred groves and around water catchments. Compared to Christianity there is no evidence of a complex network of

² As Napier (1992: 51) puts it: 'the sentimental historicism, or puritanical romanticism, of many ecologists actually contributes to the disintegration of other cultures by fixing them, by arresting them, with a name. In naming, we relieve ourselves of the burden of actually considering the implication of how a different way of thinking can completely transform the conditions that make for meaningful social relations'.

artefacts and monuments. However, this is no reason to assume that the religion was any less 'potent' than Christianity: oral societies can express complex religious thought in non-material ways, as we know from Australian Aboriginal traditions (Pattel-Gray 1996). Comparative elements can be established between most of the surrounding pre-Christian religions³, such as what we know of English and Scandinavian belief systems.

There were similar social and religious figures coordinating and administering the belief systems. In the Irish system, there were the druids and the seers (*filid*) who had roles as organisers of religious life, and as poets and prophets (Stevenson 1989: 150). Druids have also been described in less 'sophisticated' and in more tribal terms as 'shamans'. Christian sources position druids in opposition to the saints: in the *Lives of Patrick and Columba* they are described as making the snow fall, raising contrary winds or covering a place in darkness (Picard 1981: 93). Regardless of how we choose to label these figures, they were responsible for the day-to-day coordination and administration of their belief system. Additionally, their social responsibilities appear to have permeated the power structures of the day. They are believed to have reinforced the position and power of the elite and confirmed the place of freeman grades (Mytum 1992: 54). Depictions of these 'shamans' can be found relatively late on a variety of artefacts that might indicate a survival of the indigenous belief system beyond Christianity, e.g. on the base of the Monasterboice and Castledermot Crosses (Fig. 45) (Webb 1992: 58-61) or on the Torslunda dies (MacLean 1986: 194).

Although the belief systems of early Celtic religion and Christianity are essentially very different structures, some elements of the former, such as the priestly role of druids, were undoubtedly adopted by the early Christian church (Sjoestedt 1940: 5). Mytum (1992: 59) believes that the 'pagan belief system was not an intellectual framework but worked on a basis of fear' – and this has also been a description of early Christianity. Pre-Christian religions, as with Christianity, were organised around the secular elite. The core of the pre-Christian social practice in Ireland was the king and his relationship to the land/mother goddess. The survival of people was dependent on the sovereignty of the chief, which was bestowed by the goddess of the land (Sjoestedt 1940: 4-5; Brenneman 1991: 75), a split that functioned to accommodate the different roles of the king in society. The role of kingship shall be dealt with in more detail later.

³ Sjoestedt (1940: 4-5) says that, 'in the absence of common religious origins, we shall seek certain religious attitudes, certain forms of mythological imagery that are common to the whole Celtic area. The names of deities, and doubtless also the plotting of the myths, may differ; but the types seem nonetheless analogous, and, even more than the elements of each system, the equilibrium which controls them seemed here and there to be similar. The formal contrasts make the structural resemblance all the more striking'.

The largest regional centre in early Ireland was at Tara (Davidson 1992: 27), and this location was also a political centre surrounded by four kingdoms. A division of the landscape may be reflected in the material culture, with the Irish High Cross representing the *axis mundi*, as will be discussed below. It is likely that there was some deliberate transferral of meanings or residual meanings associated with the standing stones from the pre-Christian belief system. Christian artefacts would have been interpreted from the 'background books'⁴ that the audience had until their Christian education was established on an intertextual level. With this in mind, it is important to have a clear understanding not only of the usage of the crosses but the nature of the belief system (church) that developed them. This will help to establish the socio-semiotic context in which they were placed, in particular to define the relationship axis between the message makers and their intended audience. It will also allow for further insights into the nature of the message that the High Crosses was meant to be communicating.

THE IRISH CHURCH

To understand how the Irish High Crosses functioned, there is a need to investigate the early Irish Church and the methods that it used to integrate itself rapidly into Irish culture and society. This helps establish an understanding of the actions and innovations that the early church implemented to convert Ireland. This will help us to understand what characteristics unique to the Irish church contributed to the innovative development of the ringed High Cross.

The defining feature of the early Irish church is its monastic nature. The main monastic centres are believed to be in south-east Ulster, in Leinster and Munster (see Map 2) (Flower 1954: 57). There are larger settlements such as Clonmacnois about which we are relatively well informed and which made a considerable contribution towards the development of Irish Christian monuments. However, some caution should be used when using the term monasticism in Ireland because different scholars use it as an umbrella term, signifying anything from small isolated settlements to ones that represent the largest settlements in Ireland at the time. For the purposes of this study, it is defined as a religious and social movement that had two main forms:

1. Eremitic— where clergy lived in isolation from other individuals or in small groups
2. Cenobitic – where members of the religious order lived together. These settlements had more non-Christian and non-ecclesiastical contacts.

⁴ Umberto Eco (1998a) employs the useful term *background book* to explain the process of interpretation. These 'background books' signify the cumulative learning and cultural considerations that we use to 'read' new information. This and other relevant communication theories shall be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Six.

Small sites might have looked like the reconstruction of Reask, Co. Kerry (Fig. 178) by Fanning (1981), while the plans of more developed sites such as the later Kells, Co. Meath (Fig. 179) show a more developed settlement and social plan. A distribution map of the main monastic centres at this time is illustrated in Fig. 2 (Bitel 1990: xvi; also Hurley 1982: Fig. 18.1). The varieties of freestanding cross forms are closely related to these two different contexts of monastic activity.

While we are able to define a monastery easily, it is not so easy to define its inhabitants. What qualified an individual as a Christian is uncertain. As Fletcher (1997: 91) warns us, 'we must remember that we are in an age where there were many shades of monasticism'. The nature of the early Irish church has been the cause of much debate because of its difference from other West European churches. There is some confusion about the status of authorities in charge of the Irish religious settlements (Abrams 1993: 180-181), largely caused by the co-existence of two different systems of church government operating at that time: an episcopally administered church and emerging monastic traditions.

Fletcher (1997: 26) has shown that monasticism was already well-developed in Europe, spreading 'like wildfire in the fourth century', while Irish monasteries are thought to have been established as early as the sixth century (Hurley 1982: 298-299; Cuppage 1986: 257). The island of Lérins, France, is believed to have been instrumental in the transmitting of monasticism to Ireland (Bowen 1972: 31). The growth in monasticism and the church in Ireland are attributed to the work of Patrick in the fifth century⁵, but the initial conversion of Ireland was probably accomplished under bishops (Abrams 1993: 181). It has been suggested that initially bishops from Gaul and Britain governed the early Irish church in the fifth century, remaining separate from the growing monastic traditions until the late seventh century (de Paor 1993: 4). This early church organisation was therefore diocesan and episcopal in nature and based on Roman systems; though Hurley (1982: 297) has added conditionally, that 'the traditional model of Christian organisation had to be greatly modified in order to adapt it to the Irish context'. The result of this modification was the uniquely Irish brand of monasticism. It is believed that the involvement of monasteries in church government only became the common form in the later seventh and eighth centuries (Cuppage 1986: 257), when the Irish church is thought to have reached its full development (Sharpe 1984: 234-239). However, Dumville (1993: 181) cautions that 'there is little reason to allow that before the twelfth century there was any uniform pattern of Gaelic ecclesiastical government'.

⁵ Dumville (1993: 65-84) provides a more detailed account of the historical perceptions of Patrick of this time.

The process of development of the church in Ireland has been described by Hughes: 'In Ireland there were at first bishops in *túatha*, then kin groups set up monasteries, and monastic *paruchia* developed which had little or no relation to the *túatha*. For a time the two systems must have coexisted, then the monasteries became the sole source of ecclesiastical government' (1981: 12). This was not a process that happened 'rapidly or so uniformly' (Hughes 1966: x), an assessment endorsed by Ó Cróinín (1995: 149). The success of Christianity in Ireland is closely linked to its diffusion through kin groups. Abrams (1993: 180) believes that the spread of monasticism was connected to the number of kin groups that remained pagan: 'it is not surprising to be told that the last pagan king of the Southern *Uí Neill* was *Diarmait mac Cerbaill* (ob. 565), although whether this information has any historical validity remains in question. While major political dynasties remained pagan, the spread of the new religion might have remained restricted and the security of the Church precarious even in the east of Ireland' (1993: 180). With the major political dynasties converting to Christianity, the church was able to bring Ireland predominantly under Christian influence by the end of the eighth century. In the seventh-eighth centuries, changes in secular law that identified part of the church as a separate 'kin group' – the *Céle Dé* or 'clients of God' (Melia 1982: 367). Mytum (1992: 74) suggests that an individual church's arrangement with the secular authority might vary. However, monasteries were by the end of the eighth century integrated into early Irish society with the equivalent rights to other kin groups and capable of functioning as legal entities.

The term 'monastic' has been criticised by some scholars as being too broad to describe the variety of church settlements in Ireland at this time (Sharpe 1984: 260-261; Abrams 1993: 179). Hurley believes that 'too often the term monastery tends to be applied as a blanket term to cover all early Irish ecclesiastical sites. There are considerable variations in size, layout, nature and function between different sites' (1982: 299). The monastic system of the eighth century is thought to have developed into a system of monastic federations or *paruchia* under abbots (Cuppige 1986: 257). However, Sharpe (1984: 260-266) has argued that there is no evidence of either the early existence of dioceses or of monastic federations.

The main differences between the episcopal and the monastic traditions revolved around the founding philosophies and the rules regarding succession and control of the church. Monasteries were established by kin groups (Hughes 1981: 12-15) and as a result abbatial succession tended to be hereditary rather than by appointment by the Roman church. It has been suggested that the abbatial succession was from the discarded segments of royalty, which had been pushed out of politics and into the church (Ó Corráin 1981: 328) and that abbots were still involved in secular politics (Hurley 1982: 328). This would ensure that the lands donated to the church and the influence that the

monastery developed would remain in family hands. It appears, however, that sometimes the boundary between secular politics and religion was blurred: for example, Muiredach the king of Leinster (died c. 885) was also abbot of Kildare (Doherty 1985: 70).

Sharpe has defined the specific differences in roles between the bishop and priest:

The abbot who ran the monastic household and its revenues often remained a priest. He did not take over the bishop's pastoral responsibilities, nor in any sense replace the bishop; his role was, in ecclesiastical terms, secondary, and only the greatest abbots had the legal status of a bishop...in many churches, monastic and secular clergy must very often have lived side by side. The distinction of the third function, that of the *coarb*, depends on the increasing scale of the church's temporalities, and in particular on the political control of people which property rights conveyed. It is this which is the essential peculiarity of the Irish Church, but it does not come about by revolutionary change. The three functions develop in response to the church's growing needs, influenced by the surrounding political framework, and the tenacity of family ties and property interests (1984: 266).

This gives the impression that we should not expect a uniform organisation of the early Irish church at this stage⁶. The role of the bishop would have remained important for the ordination of new clerics, as well as performing other ecclesiastical duties (Hurley 1982: 328). Sharpe believes that this differentiated the Irish church from other European churches. The result is that the line between secular and ecclesiastical is so blurred: 'the real absorption of the church into Irish society happened during the seventh to eleventh centuries, a process in which the church was moulded to the secular pattern to a degree not found elsewhere in western Europe' (1984: 267-268)⁷.

The influence of the emerging monastic centres was vast compared to the preceding system of church government. Hughes (1981: 15) states that 'in Ireland kin groups founded monasteries without much reference to diocesan bishops and disciples of monastic founders spread the monastic *paruchia* far outside the immediate vicinity of the chief monastery.' Bede reports that Columcille's monastery at Iona held *principatus* over all the churches associated with its founder in Britain and Ireland (EH: iii.4; trans. Colgraves and Mynors 1969: 223). Irish monasteries are identified as having formed a large network on the continent and in Northumbria by the end of the seventh century (Holländer 1974: 6-7).

⁶ Dumville (1993: 181) has said 'we should not deceive ourselves into thinking that a single, alternative form of administration is thus implied. There may have been executive monastic bishops in some tuatha, but managerial abbots with purely sacramental bishops in others'.

⁷ By comparison, Welsh bishops played a greater part in the running of their churches (Hughes 1981: 1).

The growth of the Christian church in a material sense was accompanied by a corresponding evolution in its self-definition. The doctrine of the Christian church was formulated in the fourth and fifth centuries, when the heresies were being defined (Bethell 1981: 39), and it was during this period that the Irish church was organised and was in contact with Britain and Gaul (Neuman de Vegvar 1987: 23; de Paor 1993: 35; Roe 1965: 215). While there certainly was interaction with the continent, the Irish church may have taken its greatest inspiration directly from the east (Raw 1990: 4). Two major controversies in the seventh century would support this view: the debate regarding the computation of Easter and the use of a Celtic form of tonsure for priests. This issue increased in importance with the expansion of the Irish church into Britain and Europe (Mytum 1992: 79). This would indicate that the Irish church was relatively autonomous from Rome, capable of defining its own traditions and making its own innovations. It is in this climate that the Irish High Crosses were developed.

THE MONASTIC IDEAL

The inspiration behind the cultural and social transformation, which led to the popularity of monasticism, appears to find its origins in the east. At its core monasticism was an attempt to segregate oneself from society, in order to emulate the lifestyles of the 'desert' saints, in a life of austerity and ascetic practices. There are several different explanations for this. The wilderness lifestyle of the hermit monk could have been an attempt to 'attain the spiritual felicity of Adam before the Fall' (Schapiro 1944: 161). Alternatively, it has also been suggested that monasticism followed the 'cult of Saints Paul and Anthony' (Flower 1954: 89; Roe 1965: 217). Another possible influence could have been the biblical precedent of John the Baptist's life in the desert (Fletcher 1997: 26). Alternatively, the trials of Jesus against the devil showed that the desert was a place where faith was tested. A primary motivation for this lifestyle has been summarised by Mytum (1992: 60): 'It was individual sin and repentance that were central, as were the ideas of God's forgiveness and because of the hope of salvation'. To achieve this, early Christians cut themselves off from non-Christians. Regardless of the exact inspiration, it is clear that solitude and isolation (from non-Christians) were the goals. The 'desert' theme in Ireland had a powerful impact on the art and culture of the time⁸.

It is unlikely that the development of monasticism in Ireland was the result of some parthenogenetic response to an Irish interpretation of the scriptures. It is more likely that these practices were the

⁸ The toponymy of Ireland has place names containing the element *disert*, the Latin *desertum*, 'the anchorite's solitary cell' (Flower 1954: 89; Schapiro 1944: 161) (see Map 15).

result of outside influences. There are similarities between the monasticism of Egyptian anchorites and that practised in Ireland during the sixth and seventh centuries (Schapiro 1944: 161). This Egyptian model, or perhaps the Irish model, appears to have also been adopted in Britain (Schapiro 1944: 174). The Irish church may have been in close contact with centres of Egyptian monasticism (MacLean 1986: 179), and Streit (1984: 66) has even gone as far as to suggest that there was direct influence in the form of seven Egyptian monks living at *Disert Vlihb* in Ireland. Irish clergy were called *Pueri Egyptiaci* for their following of the desert fathers and because the Irish church followed an unorthodox computation of Easter based on an Egyptian canon (Schapiro 1944: 161)⁹. However, there is no evidence of direct Coptic contact.

This discussion, of monastic inspiration, is important to understand in terms of defining its popularity with the Irish population. The preceding discussion highlights the closer relationship between secular and spiritual interests but does not explain this type of Christianities appeal in Ireland. Areas of complementarity can be drawn between the nature of this early eastern monasticism and the non-Christian belief structure. One of the characteristics of Irish monasticism was the 'cultic' devotion to the 'desert fathers'; these were generally Coptic or Syrian in origin. A side effect of this is that the Irish church emulated these traditions by venerating its own saints¹⁰. This might have been to reinforce local relevance or because of the remoteness of eastern saints. This tradition enabled a monastery to strengthen its bond with its own community and the relationship between the local church and the Bible. This relationship is noted by Stock (1983: 72), who claimed that: 'Monastic communities generally commemorated saints throughout the liturgical year, the recollection of the abbey's patron or protector formed an integral part of the *opus divinum*'. This resulted in local cults and the need for 'material souvenirs of celestial patrons'. The exact nature of these souvenirs and their relationship to freestanding crosses shall be dealt with below.

The presence of these desert fathers would not have been perceived as a foreign introduction to the pre-Christian religion of Ireland, since these early desert fathers shared many characteristics with the druids. It was believed, for example, that those who were buried in a monastic cemetery near the remains of the original founder would rise with him at the judgment (Flower 1954: 94), a role not dissimilar to that of a shaman (druid) who, as psychopomp, guides the dead to their ancestral home in the otherworld through ritual dances. The effect of both these beliefs is that once again the belief system reinforces the role of the priest caste within the social group. Another characteristic that the

⁹ Alcuin of York discussed the difference in calculations between the Roman and Egyptian methods is referred to in a letter to Charlemagne A.D. 798 (*Letter 78*; trans. Allott 1974: 93-94)

¹⁰ This role was not limited to males; there were many female saints.

'desert fathers' shared with shamans or druids was an affinity with nature. 'On occasions, the saint is depicted in the role of folk/hero, routing the pagan druids with more powerful magic, and evoking wonder by feats such as the multiplication of the poor man's five cows into one hundred and five' (Herbert 1988: 16-17). St Patrick, Columcille and St Brigit are all depicted as triumphing over pagan magic (Hughes 1981: 13; Picard 1981: 93). Additionally, local saints were often constructed as narrative counterpoints to the Old Testament, especially in relating Patrick to Moses (Bieler 1979: 7, 84-97; Hennig 1951: 238). The ways that the early insular saints triumphed over the pagans share many elements with eastern saints' lives. In the Anglo-Saxon martyrology, Saint Erasmus was a bishop who went into a desert for seven years and was fed by a raven. Characteristics of the story were borrowed from 'Anthony and Paul' or 'Elijah fed by the raven' (Schapiro 1944: 161). This would indicate that the achievements and characteristics of the early insular saints might have been modelled on the achievements of the eastern desert fathers¹¹.

THE EVOLUTION OF IRISH MONASTICISM

In the archaeological record, there appears to be a direct link between the spread of standing stones and the Christian populations associated with monasteries (Thomas 1973b: 28). An understanding of the development of monasteries is therefore significant to our understanding of the context in which the High Crosses were developed. In particular, the Irish form of monasticism appears to have been as unique as the development of the High Cross itself. The crosses as public artefacts would have been developed as mediators of this new relationship between Church and audience.

It is important to remember that the development of monasticism was not necessarily linked to the spread of Christianity in Ireland. The development of monasteries might be independent of the adoption of Christianity. The country is believed to be 'Christian' in nature by the fifth century (de Paor 1993:38; Edwards 1990:99; Roe 1965: 215), and the mechanism by which the country was 'converted' was St Patrick's tapping into the existing infrastructure of the Irish kin system. Educating (converting) the noble-class assisted spreading the word to a much wider audience (Mytum 1992: 75). Patrick was able to convince young nobles among the elite to become monks and nuns of Christ¹². The authority of secular elites behind the church gave it great influence over the general populace.

¹¹ Irish and British saints performed a number of miracles in association with animals. These miracles were similar to those of the Egyptian hermits demonstrating their closeness and affiliation with nature (Schapiro 1944: 174). These are in turn similar to themes that are found in the Bible (Hennig 1951: 238).

¹² In Patrick's *Confessio* he states: 'Meanwhile I kept giving rewards to kings, besides which I kept giving a fee to their sons, who walk with me...' (trans. Howlett 1994: 87). This suggests that he focused on converting the secular elite.

This was essential to Christianity because it needed to be near population centres (Bethell 1981: 38-39), something that had not been a major consideration for the preceding belief system. Irish monasticism was therefore an organisational structure that evolved with the conversion of the ruling classes.

Noble families 'sponsored' the new church with donations of land; initially these donations were hardly prime real estate (Herity 1984): 'From the subsistence viewpoint, marginal land was often under-utilised in the first few centuries of the early Christian period, and so donation to the church would not have been a great loss' (Mytum 1992: 172-173). However, the assumption that monasteries were situated on marginalised land, has been challenged from two perspectives. Firstly, Ó Riain (1972: 23) who claims contrary to our 'strategic' perspective that settlements should be located in the centre of territories that, 'the location of political headquarters on boundary lines was a well-established feature of Irish society'. Additionally, he points out that monks were legally members of a professional class so were required to set up on territorial boundaries (1972:26). Roads generally ran along the borders of territories so it would make sense that centres of industry were located close. Assemblies, to be discussed below in the context of early markets, were organised on boundaries as well. He suggests that to some extent Churches performed a mediatory role between peoples of adjoining territories¹³. The second perspective is forwarded by Nieke and Duncan (1988), who believe that royalty sponsored monasteries in areas where 'royal control was weakest' – that is, on their current boundaries of influence. This was with the prospect that newly converted populations would be more likely to support a Christian king. Related to this is the view of Charles-Edwards (1984: 168), who has suggested that churches of conquered *tuath* were forcefully subjected to the favoured church of the conquerors. This allowed the conqueror to acquire territorial interests and control in subject territories in secular and spiritual domains.

It should also be recalled that because many of the monasteries were established by a kin-group, and abbots were often hereditary, this land would remain in the family (Hurley 1982: 327). A further consideration is that land of little 'value'¹⁴ would have been quite apposite for a community trying to model itself on the austerity of the 'desert fathers'. They would have segregated themselves by default this was inline with the very spirit of early monasticism.

¹³ Warner (1988: 66) in his analysis of the archaeology of early Irish kingship notes that the royal site at Clogher appears to meet the 'central-place' theory but he is not aware of any others that do. This would appear to support Ó Riain's views. Clogher itself might represent a territory that annexed a neighbour; because the main route of the valley runs past both the royal site and the monastery this suggests at one time that this might have been a boundary.

¹⁴ Monastic sites at 'Skellig Michael', 'Illauntanig' and Iona are examples of monasteries that were isolated and in physically undesirable areas.

By the end of the seventh century, the church was still quite fragmented in Ireland, with synods no longer being held, reflecting increasing secular control of the religious organisation. The relationship between the early Christian church and the local royalty was symbiotic: 'the fortunes of both king and monastery were therefore intertwined - the former gaining spiritual legitimacy for his position, the latter a powerful protector' (Ó Floinn 1994: 252). Ó Corráin (1981: 327) states of the Armagh relationship, '...the Armagh and *Uí Neill* kings were working in tandem, each it would seem content to boost the pretensions of the other'; a view echoed by Nieke and Dunkan (1988: 10-11) in their assessment of the relationship of the early church and the Dalriada Kings as 'symbiotic'.

The impact of a change in political focus on the Christian priests is important when considering the evolution of artistic and communication themes of the crosses. In particular, the priests had an evolving relationship with the ruling classes:

'As the political importance factor of the individual *tíath* lessened with the increased concentration of power in over-kings and provincial kings, so this was mirrored and legitimised by the monasteries following the same route. The type of arguments put forward by the larger monasteries such as Clonmacnois or Armagh to justify their position were also applied to the more powerful kings' (Mytum 1992: 73-74).

There is evidence that a monastery offered benefits to the secular rulers other than spiritually justifying their authority. The Clonmacnois monastery was under the control of successive kings of Connacht, as is shown by the burial of royal personages at the monastery (Ó Floinn 1994: 251). As discussed above, the presence of a saint buried there would guarantee a place in the after life (Flower 1954: 94)¹⁵. In an infant community, who could be more important to receive a place in the next life than the current secular leaders? Additionally, it would have been beneficial to pay burial dues to the church of ones kindred (Charles Edwards 1984: 167). There were various other benefits: possessions could be relatively safely stored in monasteries at time of war, being sacred ground; the sacred grounds could be used as neutral meeting grounds; and it was a place where kings could retire (Bethell 1981: 44). In return, kings richly endowed the monasteries and sponsored artisans (Ó Floinn 1994: 252; Hicks 1980: 6), though Doherty (1980: 72) has asked 'did kings retain a claim on gifts such as chalices and patens?'

¹⁵ There would have been other economic benefits for the monasteries in this relationship. Burial revenues were an important source of revenue for monasteries (Hurley 1982: 325), though some areas would appear to have been too sacred for the laity, such as Iona (Macdonald 1984: 284).

This close relationship between the ruling class and the early church would have had an economic advantage for the church. Running a religion was a very costly process. Christianity is a religion of books, in particular needing copies of both the Bible and service books (Bethell 1981: 43). Kitzinger (1940: 37) echoes this view: 'Most important among the new crafts introduced by the missionaries was the writing and illuminating of the books. The Gospels were the motive powers behind the Christian mission and elaborate pictorial illustration their almost indispensable accessory'. In order to spread the work of the church, clerics needed copies of the scriptures and resources were hard to locate. It is unlikely that papyrus could be imported from Egypt (Bethell 1981: 43). The other solution was vellum, but about 400 skins are needed to make one gospel book. This represents a significant expenditure and display of wealth that only the nobles would have been able to afford¹⁶. Other elements of Christian practice that needed to be imported were wine and oils. There was also a trade in art works from the east that may have been sponsored by secular parties.

The effect of these requirements was that the monasteries became centres of technology and intellectual advancement. The monasteries were places 'where "sacred technology" was practised, the crafts of writing and decorating books, of working in wood and stone and metal; places therefore where exchange could occur' (Fletcher 1997: 91-92). This represents a significant difference between the early Christian period and the preceding culture. Ireland was never a Roman territory and there is no archaeological evidence that it benefited from Roman technologies before the introduction of Christianity. The early Christian period marked the first use of Roman craft and agriculture techniques. With increased 'urbanism' and the commencement of long-distance trade, the monasteries began to concentrate wealth and as a result power and secular influence.

The introduction of monasteries also marked other changes to the socio-economic landscape in Ireland. Before moving to 'urban' development, Ireland had a socio-economic structure based around the redistribution of wealth through the kin-group - a reciprocal system. This changed to a tributary mode of production, which divides the population into surplus producers and takers¹⁷. Class replaces kinship, a process that was occurring across Europe between the fifth and tenth centuries (Hodges 1988: 4-5). This development, which Hodges ties to the introduction of the

¹⁶ The importance of recognising this cost of books will be discussed in relation to the advent of the figurative decoration of stone in the section on communication, Chapter Six below.

¹⁷ A consideration is posited by Gerriets (1981: 171), who believes that this early system of exchange had an important social role: the 'exchange in early Irish society differed from modern society in that its purpose was not simply the swapping of goods; very often exchange forged a strong bond between individuals'. A change to a tributary system also changes the nature of social relations and bonds to whom you were paying.

church, manifested itself in the growth of 'towns' and market-places. These larger settlements, such as Clonmacnois, Kells and Glendalough, could have had populations of over 2,000 people¹⁸.

This centralisation of population and economy had noticeable effects on early church and secular authority. 'The inception of tributary relations with the advent of the Church and the significant sequence of stages by which the royal *élites* increased their authority by exacting 1) more direct food-rents (tribute), and 2) social labour in the form of military obligations' (Hodges 1998: 5-6). This would have tied the church to secular authority. The significance of this change is also highlighted by Doherty: 'The same period saw the evolution of a tribal society in which kinship was an integral aspect of all activity - social, political, religious and economic - towards one in which power was based on territory within which local communities that had lost their independence, were becoming more remote from central authority and where links though kinship in some areas of life were replaced by *contractus*' (1985: 45). The subsequent behavioural changes affected the social and political hierarchy for both the church and local rulers: 'on a higher level institutions such as kingship or the church gathered to themselves tribute which they then redistributed. Although this caused a circulation of goods the object was the binding of people together; landlord and tenant, king and vassal, king and nobles, the church and the faithful' (Doherty 1980: 67-68). Doherty suggests that the basic motive for the church and royalty to become involved in the redistribution of goods was taxation from which came profit.

These changes are important to this study of High Crosses for two reasons:

1. It is likely that these changes produced the economic surpluses that would have been necessary to fund the creation of the High Crosses
2. We find High Crosses prominent in the newly developing market places.

A secular development that has been connected to monasteries was the relocation of the traditional tribal *óenach* – the meeting place for political assembly, markets and festivals - to monasteries. 'There is evidence that some monasteries had taken over this function by the eighth or ninth centuries...I would suggest that the adoption by major churches of the function of *óenach* is a response to a need for local exchange' (Doherty 1980: 81)¹⁹. Wooding (1996: 95) has said that the use of the tribal assembly for trade is debatable but agrees with Doherty that the monastic assemblies took on this

¹⁸ 'The larger monastic settlements...deserve consideration as quasi-urban forms or urban nodes' (Butlin 1977: 22).

¹⁹ Ó Riain (1972: 24-26) view, discussed above, that monasteries were established – as centres of production with professional status – on boundaries would appear to support this.

role in the eighth century or later²⁰. Doherty has identified the first monastic *óenach* in the *Annals of Ulster* s.a. 799, which records the death of a local at the fair of MacCuilinn at Luska, Co.Dublin²¹. He argues that while there is a tendency to believe that market places are a later development it is likely that the major sites at Armagh, Kells and Glendalough had an early *óenach*. The market crosses provide evidence of this, he says, citing the Armagh *óenach macha* being marked by a north and a south cross according to the *Vita Tripartita*, c. 900 (trans. Stokes 1887: 238-239). However, Aitchison (1994: 232) has questioned the existence of the Southern Cross. He believes that it is possible that the *óenach macha* was a scribal error for *ard macha* and suggests that this cross might be one of two other crosses already cited in the *Annals*.

Graham (1993a: 30) believes that the development of the market place is a key step in the urban development of Ireland²². He states that this move resulted in permanent market places within monastic grounds between the tenth and twelfth centuries. Significantly, for this study, he notes that at the monastic sites of Armagh, Glendalough, Co. Wicklow and Kells, Co. Meath, the market place lay to the south-east of the ecclesiastical core, often marked with a special cross. The significance of this position will be discussed in more detail below. Graham believes that this established the monasteries as centres for exchange and trade. He suggests that the positioning of the market place resulted in a shift of the centre of gravity of the settlement away from the ecclesiastical centre to a secular one. He cites the continuous settlements at Kildare and Kells as examples. This creates what he calls 'town at monastery' within the *valla* (walls) rather than monastic towns. He states that:

'there is some evidence that town genesis in Ireland originated from the morphogenesis of monasteries into secular settlements in which the church fulfilled one but not necessarily the definitive function, a process symbolised morphologically by the juxtaposition of royal fortresses and monasteries. In turn this infers institutional complexity and, perhaps, the pre-eminence of the governmental over the spiritual role' (1993a: 38). Furthermore, he believes that there is no reason to dismiss the possibility of non-monastic towns at this time.

The churches of the eighth and ninth centuries would have been both prosperous and powerful (Ó Corráin 1981: 327). Economically, it is likely that only the largest monasteries would produce a

²⁰ Cramp (1988) is also hesitant to describe tribal assemblies in Northumbria as 'markets' in the seventh century due to the lack of currency.

²¹ 'Ailill son of Fergus, king of the south of Brega, was thrown from his horse around the Feast of MacCuilinn of Lusca, and died immediately.' From the *Annals of Ulster*, AD 799 (trans. Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, 1983: 255)

²² This process of urbanisation was occurring at the same time in Western Europe (Raleigh Radford 1977: 9).

surplus²³. Additionally, many of the larger monasteries supported smaller churches (Hurley 1982: 326). As a result, it is also likely that churches had to compete with each other for resources (Doherty 1985: 54). These concentrations of wealth probably attracted Viking raids (Sharpe 1984: 267) and made the monasteries targets closer to home²⁴. One of the ways that the wealth was protected was through the construction of *crannogs* that were believed to act as 'safes'; monastery treasures have been found from ninth-centuries *crannogs* (Kelly, E P 1991: 91)²⁵. Centralisations of wealth in any culture usually result in many cultural changes and relevant to this study are changes to the material culture and human movements to these centres.

THE MONASTIC CLERGY AND PILGRIMS

Within the monastic orders, we still have to consider what the evolving roles of the clergy were. The Irish clergy appears to have fully immersed itself in the monastic spirit of the early Christian period. Monks lived outside of normal communities and were dedicated to craft and devotions. There is the image of hermit-like monks that we can take from the 'desert fathers' who were able to commune with the beasts and aspired to role models such as 'Anthony and Paul'. But another impression that we get is one of an increasingly urban caste of clerics that was part of the day-to-day society of the Irish populations. There is evidence to suggest, however, that they maintained considerable efforts to remain selectively differentiated²⁶.

Their self-definition in this context was driven by their acculturation to Rome. From the *Sayings of Patrick*, there is a qualifying statement: 'In order to be Christians as the Romans are...' which

²³ Sharpe defines its sources of income: 'The financial returns ...[from] ecclesiastical property, whether alms, fees for baptism and burial, or a regular tithe, are tied to the provision of a ministry which would be at odds with the religious life for which the constitution of a church like Iona was designed' (1984: 247).

²⁴ Ó Corráin has condensed some of this history: 'In 760 Clonmacnoise and Birr were at war, a hostility reflected in the *Life of St Ciarán*. Four years later, there was a major battle between Clonmacnois and Durrow and *Bresse l mac Murchada*, who led Clonmacnois to victory on that occasion and was murdered shortly afterwards. In 807, there was a battle between Cork and Confert in which there was "a countless slaughter of the ecclesiastics and the noblest of the community of Cork". Kildare plundered the *Céle Dé* monastery of Tallaght in 824 and in 842 Kinnitty and Clonmacnois were at war. We can take it that the annals note only the major conflicts and countless local scuffles and skirmishes between rival monastic interests have escaped the record forever... No attacker could afford to ignore the monastic town of his enemy, frequently his ally, bound to him by dynastic ties and on occasion the place of his principal residence. And so the churches, quite apart from being victims in times of famine, were drawn into the general pattern of secular warfare' (1981: 335-336).

²⁵ Kelly identifies that four of the five main monasteries in the *Uí Neill* territory were located on waterways and has suggested that the *crannogs* themselves controlled trade along the rivers. As noted above, the early Christian period marks the first time that stone became a major construction material and, as many of the crosses were built from stone originating in quarries some distance away, the rivers would have been the easiest way to move the stone.

²⁶ They avoided comparison with the *filid*, the druidic caste of law and learning, actively avoiding the secular legal system (Mytum 1992: 54-55).

indicates that the Roman model of Christianity was what should be emulated (trans. de Paor 1993: 202). Patrick came from a British church of Roman tradition. Under his guidance, the Irish church took up Roman dress as church vestments and continued the use of Latin rather than changing the language to the vernacular (Bethell 1981: 41-43). Simple things such as 'alien' clothing and language would have been an important public symbol separating the Christian priests from other purveyors of the 'belief system' trade, the druids.

One of the characteristics of Irish monasticism was its strong missionary drive, which facilitated its rapid spread as the dominant Christian practice in Ireland. The first major religious figures were missionaries sent to Ireland, and Patrick set the pattern of missionary 'zeal'²⁷. With the consolidation of the Irish monasteries, missionaries went forth to Iona in the sixth century and by the end of the eighth century, monasteries had been established in North Britain (Bethell 1981: 45-47). There was a steady stream of clergy travelling throughout the insular regions. Evidence of their movements, as has already been discussed, can be found in the transmission of copybooks used for the construction of standing stones.

Christian travelling was not limited to processional missionaries. The presence of pilgrimage stones has been discussed. The impulse of the pilgrim was prefigured in *Psalms* 132: 7: 'we have gone into his tabernacle, and have adored the place where his feet stood'. Rich Christians went as far as Rome and possibly Palestine, since shrines to Peter and Paul were probably accessible to this part of Europe (Corish 1984: 11). Pilgrimages also became increasingly popular within Ireland (Geary 1994: 164); a focus was the burial of the local saints, whose tombs became *martyria*. The first recorded Irish pilgrim is mentioned in the *Annals of the Four Masters* in 606 A.D.²⁸, and a detailed investigation of pilgrims in early Irish literature has been undertaken by Harbison (1991: 51-54).

The decoration of certain crosses and slabs might indicate pilgrimage stations, in particular the 'crosses of arcs' that are usually shown with figures that carry satchels and staffs, e.g. the decorated stones from Glencolumbkille (Harbison, 1986: 54, 66) or a slab from Ballyvourney, Co. Cork (Fig. 143) (Hamlin 1982b: 287, Fig. 17.2D)²⁹. Other examples are the Carndonagh stele, West Face (Fig. 180) and the Papil Stone, Burra, Shetland (Fig. 181). Harbison (1986: 54) suggests that this motif

²⁷ Patrick's originality was that no one within western Christendom had thought such thoughts as these before, or had ever previously been possessed by such convictions. As far as our evidence goes, he was the first person in Christian history to take the scriptural injunctions literally; to grasp that teaching all nations meant teaching even barbarians who lived beyond the frontiers of the Roman empire' (Fletcher 1997: 86).

²⁸ 'Aedh, son of Colgan, chief of Oirghialla and of all the Airtheara, died at his pilgrimage, at Cluainmic-nois' (trans. O Donovan 1854: 233)

²⁹ The symbolism of this device has also been discussed within a broader symbolic context in Chapter 2.

might indicate centres of pilgrimage. He (1991: 84-86, 191-204) developed this theme by suggesting that *ogam* inscriptions, cross variations and pilgrimages might be linked in Ireland. More broadly, it is also possible that the Irish High Cross or standing stones of any description were the destination of pilgrimages. Symbolic crosses other than 'crosses of arcs' could be used as the destinations as shown on the frontal slab from Papil, Burra, Shetland (Fig. 182). The use of another cross form as a destination can be seen on the Coptic (Fig. 164) and Caucasian (Fig. 165) cross-slabs, depicting riders journeying towards a cross.

Standing stones were used extensively at pilgrimage destinations and their role was not limited to being markers, or signposts, or destinations. Pilgrimage stations have been identified at Rathlin O'Birne Island (dating to the sixth century) and at Caher Island, Mayo Coast (dating to the seventh century) (Herity 1995: 85). At Rathlin, there are fifteen 'pilgrimage' stations where six cross-inscribed slabs have been found. To the north of the settlement, a larger enclosure had two cross-inscribed slabs that are believed to have stood on a *leacht* as part of a *turas* or pilgrimage round (Herity 1995: 90). At the Caher Island site, there are *leacht* or penitential stones inside and outside of the enclosure. Another example of what appears to be the use of cross-inscribed slabs at intervals to mark stations in pilgrimages are found at St Berrihert's Kyle in the Glen of Aherlow, Co. Tipperary (Ó hÉailidhe 1967: 103). Bailey (1990: 126-128) in discussing the province and purpose of the Alnwick stone believes that it could be a prayer stone as a marker on the island of Inismurray, Co. Sligo a place where 'pilgrims performed set exercises and prescribed prayers in the course of a *turas* or pilgrimage'. Bailey believes that these carvings from Inismurray and Alnwick were more elaborate than those found in other areas of Ireland³⁰.

Other artefacts can be associated with pilgrimages within Ireland. The *chi-rho* pebble noted above, Fig. 144, is part of 'an increasingly numerous group of stones which are variously described as cure stones, burning stones, priest stones and, most commonly, cursing stones' (Higgins 1993: 165). The decorated pebble is thought to have been used in rituals with '*bullawn* stones'. *Bullawn* stones are a well-known feature of early ecclesiastical sites (Brindley 1988: 52; Waterman 1976: 37; Swan 1988: 4). A study of two *bullawn* stones in Kilbeg townland, Co. Wicklow, has found that they were located in the vicinity of the church, the graveyard and the holy well, a similar positioning to the 30 other stones at the Glendalough monastery, Co. Wicklow. This has led to the speculation of the former existence of a *turas* – pilgrimage round - in the valley (McGuinness and Redmond 1995: 129). In his study of

³⁰ However, contrary to this finding, it is worth noting that the pattern is identical to that found on a cross-slab at Ardamore, *Chorca Duibhne* (Fig. 195). This might indicate the evidence of pilgrims copying or transmitting designs.

Irish pilgrimage, Harbison (1991: 86) has suggested such stones can be connected to early pilgrimages. It has been suggested that as there were no early fonts (for baptisms), *bullau* stones might have fulfilled this function (Bitel 1990: 51; Mytum 1992: 91)³¹. All of these examples contribute to an impression that there was a wide range of functional and religious meanings that were associated with standing stones in different forms.

INSPIRING PILGRIMAGE: THE CULT OF THE SAINTS

There is evidence that the early churches used the commemoration of early saints to attract (and control the movement of) pilgrims. The 'cult of the saints' was both a tool of the church and a cult in its own right, developed very early in Christianity and associated with the 'tomb of martyrs'. The 'cult of the martyrs' derived from pre-Constantinian traditions that were widely found in the Mediterranean and are first found in Britain during the fifth century (Thomas 1973b: 14-15). It focused on the veneration of the remains of saints that were placed in wooden or stone altars near churches (Rollason 1989: 49). These remains were often exhumed. The whole corpse was not necessary for the purpose of veneration; hair alone could be sufficient to act as a relic (Geary 1994: 181). In Britain, the bodies of saints were prepared as principal remains and the ends of coffins were constructed so that they would remain visible (Thomas 1973b: 14-15).

Palladius probably introduced the cult to Ireland in the fifth century and brought with him relics of Saints Paul and Anthony to enhance his authority (Doherty 1984: 91-93; Roe 1965: 215). Early churches, in the fifth century, that used the name *basilica* might contain relics (Doherty 1984: 92), used to reinforce the authority of the local church. Functionally within religious practice, relics would also have acted as a focus for prayer³². They have also been identified as insignia of office, used for collecting tributes, in battles or cursing, swearing oaths or sealing compacts, and for healing (Lucas 1986). The cult of relics became the primary contact with the divine (Geary 1994: 177-179).

We know that the cult of relics had some support from the church hierarchy. Bede reports that Pope Gregory wrote to his missionary Augustine at the beginning of the seventh century. In this letter, he states that he was sending him 'relics of the holy apostles and martyrs' as well as manuscripts, altar

³¹ However, it has also been suggested that they might be used as grinding stones for grains (Cuppige 1986: 358). Alternatively, Ó Cróinín (1995: 31) has suggested they might have existed before the introduction of Christianity and were later 'absorbed' into monastic practices. The symbolism of water and baptism was discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

³² This view is supported by Rollason (1989: 43): 'It looked as if placing saints' relics inside churches was also intended to relate them to an altar - partly to accent the sanctity of the altar and partly to facilitate the saying of masses for the saint...'

cloths and church ornaments, vestments and sacred vessels and 'all such things as were generally necessary for worship and ministry of the church' (EH i.29, trans. Colgraves and Mynors 1969: 105). Foreign saints as well as local saints were used in this practice³³. However, there were differences in how the churches of different countries used saints' relics. As the Anglo-Saxon practice of moving saints' remains into churches went against Roman law, one solution was to leave the corporeal remains of the saint *in situ* and build a church around them (Rollason 1989: 34; Doherty 1984: 90). Rollason (1989: 51) suggests that the Anglo-Saxon church was following traditions from Gaul. The Irish treatment of the saints appears to be different from the Anglo-Saxon practice in that there are only two known examples of relocated remains in Ireland, the tombs of St Brigit and Bishop Conlaeth beside the altar at Kildare (Rollason 1989: 51; Mytum 1992: 89-90). However, there is evidence of competition for saints' remains within Ireland (Lucas 1986: 7-8).

The 'cult of relics' has a particular importance to the study of standing stones in the early Christian period. Stone shrines or martyrs' tombs were constructed over graves containing martyrs' bodies. Thomas (1973b: 15) believes that the open-air unroofed *cellae*, contained a form of shrine that reached south Ireland by the end of the sixth century and that this type of shrine (Class 1) is peculiar to Ireland. Contrary to this, Hamlin (1985: 295) warns that some of the 'early slab' shrines that Thomas attributes to the seventh century actually belong in the twelfth century. Considering the frequency of the shrines in the Christian world, we could expect some to have been built in Ireland at the same time as in Britain and Europe. The first shrines, as with crosses, may have been wooden and evolved into the stone forms. Altar slabs with cavities are found in Ireland and England and may have been used to hold relics (Rollason 1989: 28). Some Irish High Crosses may also have been connected to this tradition³⁴.

Examples from Britain and Ireland demonstrate that religious enclosures were deliberately set up for the display of these remains. St Chad's tomb at Lichfield had 'a hole in one side through which those who go thither out of devotion may insert their hands and take some of the dust' (EH: iv. 3-4, trans. Colgraves and Mynors 1969: 347). A shrine to St Cianan at Duleek had a hole through which the sacred could touch the dead (Bradley 1988: 316). Irish martyr tombs have been located at Beginish (932) and Capanagroun (935), Iveragh peninsula (O'Sullivan and Sheehan 1996: 248). Fanning (1981: 142-143) has suggested that the hollows on the side of slab D, Reask Co. Kerry (Fig. 53) 'indicate some other function for the stone apart from that of a cross pillar, such as a corner post for

³³ Thirty-three of the 84 known church relics, of the seventh and eighth centuries, in England have been associated with Peter and Paul (Rollason 1989: 24-25).

³⁴ This has been discussed above in Chapter 2 in relation to the origins of the capstones of some High Crosses.

a composite stone shrine or tomb'. This might be similar to the tomb of the saint at Ardoileán, Co. Galway (Fig. 126), dated to between 635 and 725 AD (Herity 1987b: 142, Fig. 1a), which had separate slabs that were placed around each face of the tomb. These structures are incorporated within rectangular enclosures to create a separate area for the remains. These examples connect freestanding crosses with the cult of relics and with pilgrimage routes.

Not all reliquaries contained fragments of saints' bodies; some reliquaries contained belongings rather than parts of the saint. House-shaped reliquaries contained the remains of saints³⁵. The later Cross of Cong (Fig. 43), 1150 AD, was constructed to contain a fragment of the 'true' cross (Stokes 1894: 103). Crawford (1923) provides a catalogue that includes book-shrines, bell-shrines, croziers, arms, hands, St Patrick's jaw, his thumb, tooth, St Brigit's shoe, St Domogart's shoe, and the paten of St Tighernán³⁶.

Irish High Crosses may have had an associated use. The 'pillow stone' of Columba was used as a base stone and O'Farrell (1984: 8-12) believes that High Crosses might have been part of founders' tomb structures. The direct association of the Irish High Crosses and saints comes in the form of inscriptions. The Kells Tower Cross inscription, '*Patricii et Columbie Cruce*', would indicate that the cross was dedicated to the saints (Higgitt 1986: 129). We also know that crosses dedicated to saints, located at Armagh, listed in the *Annals of Ulster*³⁷. We still refer to three of the Iona crosses by saints' names, though Robertson (1975: 111) warns that the naming of the St John's Cross, Iona is not ancient.

Aside from promoting their spiritual message, there were economic and political benefits for the monasteries in developing and promoting their own saints and relics. The commemoration of a local saint would mean that the monastery would become a centre of pilgrimage (Sharpe 1984: 267-268) and would also benefit from producing material souvenirs (Stock 1983: 72). Anniversaries of the death of the 'holy dead' were the particular focus of many pilgrims to their church (Corish 1984: 11).

As has been discussed, the shrines were designed so that worshippers could view the remains. Rollason (1989: 42) claims that part of the reason that remains were exhumed and moved back into the church in Britain was so that the church could 'gain undisputed possession of the relics and their

³⁵ Rollason (1989: 32) has been able to identify a series of five or six different types of reliquaries.

³⁶ The Moylough belt shrine (700AD) is an elaborate case for a leather belt (O'Kelly 1964).

³⁷ For example, from the *Annals of Ulster*, Year 1166, in discussing the burning of Armagh, the following crosses are mentioned: 'Cross of Colum-cille', 'Cross of Bishop Eogan', 'Cross of St. Sechnall' and the 'Crosses of St. Brigit' (trans. Hennessy and MacCarthy 1893: 153).

miraculous power'. Another reason was that once the relics became a valuable commodity they became harder to control. The relics went on circuits through districts and this generated income, although this would have had a spiritual purpose as well (Doherty 1984: 92-96). Doherty suggests that the larger sites such as Armagh used relics to bring 'churches directly under [their] wing'. The account of the seventh century writer Cogitosus of the church of Kildare indicates a similar practice:

'And who can count the different crowds and numberless peoples flocking from all the provinces – some for the abundant feasting, others for the healing of their afflictions, others to watch the pageant of the crowds, others with great gifts and offerings – to join in the solemn celebration of the feast of Saint Brigit who, freed from care, cast off the burden of the flesh and followed the lamb of God into the heavenly mansions, having fallen asleep on the first day of the month of February' (trans. Connolly and Picard 1987: 27, LSB 32: 10).

We know that there was a trade in Roman relics along secular as well as religious routes (Geary 1994: 182-189). Geary has stated that,

The initial redistribution of saints' relics in northern and Eastern Europe was far from random. It was part of a careful program of Carolingian ecclesiastical policy carried out by the leading bishops and abbots of the Frankish church. Indeed, the control over the distribution of relics was one of the keystones of ecclesiastical control over the sacred...Carolingian synods sought to limit the proliferation of shrines containing sacred relics and not directly under the supervision of approved clergy; the proliferation of new, unauthorised cults; and the authorisation of secular and episcopal authorities of transferral of saints' remains to a new location... (1994: 168).

Geary (1994: 178-179) also believes that priests and popular religion both shared the cult of the saints: 'Töpfer in particular, in a brilliant Marxist analysis of the relationship between reform and saints' cults, suggests that the monastic exploitation of popular devotion of relics was the specific means by which clerical elites influenced and mobilised mass support. But such mobilisation presupposes popular devotion to saints and their relics'. He refers to Boniface who discovered that the 'people of God' were actively pursuing pre-Christian cult practices transferred to Christian saints. In AD 742, Boniface had a decree passed by the council called under his direction at *Germania Prima* to ensure that these practices stopped³⁸.

³⁸ 'in accordance with the canons each bishop should take care...that the people of God should not do pagan things but should abandon and repudiate all the filthy practices of the gentiles, be it sacrifices to the dead or divination or immolation of sacrificial animals, things which ignorant people do in the pagan way next to churches in the name of holy martyrs or confessors' (cited and trans. in Geary 1994: 181).

Christianity did not have an immediate victory over the indigenous belief system. The Church recognised that there were non-Christians and 'syncretic' Christians – those who claimed to pay tribute to both Christian and 'pagan' gods³⁹. The Irish church, in the first half of the sixth century, was 'in a society which was still to a great degree pagan. We hear of Christians taking oaths before soothsayers in the manner of pagans', or Christian clerics standing as legal sureties for pagans and pagans who attempt, intriguingly, to make offerings to Christian churches - they are to be refused. 'We get the sense of Christianity and paganism co-existing and in some sense interpenetrating in the Ireland for which the bishops legislated' (Fletcher 1997: 87).

The Irish High Crosses should be interpreted from within this context. The possibility of non-Christian and Christian practices in Ireland co-existing at the same time will be discussed in more detail below. The implications are that the Church must have made accommodations for the way that it dealt and communicated with the secular world where political power was still in hands of the rulers that might come in different shades of devotion. Even if we accept that being Christian was a term that should be applied with some reservation, and that there were different levels of devotion, we still do not know what the Church's position on the 'lay' interpretation of these relics was. This would have been a problem for an early Church, as relics would have encouraged belief in the power of God in a competitive sense against non-Christian powers. We know that early saints demonstrated 'magical powers' but there is no evidence that Irish practices resulted in the lack of control that enraged Boniface.

According to Hulin (1989: 94), 'An object of the cult (i.e. a focus of worship) plays a more active role in religious life than a cult object (i.e. an artefact used in the act of worship). The former, by its nature, is more scarce in the material record than the latter'. It is not clear whether the 'lay' person would have been more inspired by the saint or by the material representation of God. If we accept Geary's explanation that saints were merely substituted for local gods we have no way of knowing what store the pre-Christian religions would put on artefacts. Belting, in discussing cultic devotions; states that such a devotion

has to be distinguished from those liturgical practices in which images were merely included. Cultic devotion is a function conferred upon a particular individual image by some agent who is able to organise that devotion...Cultic devotion only becomes evident when it acquires an organised form, a condition which is fulfilled only by public and confraternal

³⁹ 'Caesarius of Arles, Martin of Braga, Gregory of Tours, Pope Gregory the Great, had as their principal concern the problem of how to make people who were nominally Christian more thoroughly Christian' (Fletcher 1997: 63).

cultic worship. If the cultic worship was performed by a community, or was open to pilgrims, it required an institutional framework in order to manifest itself (1990: 23).

This would imply that the 'cult of the relics' was being driven by the churches in Western Europe.

The powers of the cult objects in this context are associated with the power of *virtus*. 'The Irish tradition uses *virtus* to mean miraculous power, a miracle in itself, and virtue inherent in God, as well as healing virtue residing in God's will in individual persons' (Thomas 1973a: 2). This *virtus* was seen as being transferable to other objects. Additionally, we find aspects of sympathetic magic and healing associated with *virtus*. An example of this is the touch of Christ: 'Healing takes place by contact, when virtue flows readily by Divine grace from the healer to the afflicted' (Thomas 1973a: 6). This sort of 'power', regardless of theology, must have appeared to be 'magic' to the lay population.

If we consider the Irish High Crosses from this perspective, their decorations may have a semi-magical role (Henry 1965: 135; Flower 1954). There has been some suggestion that decorations were as apotropaic forces, e.g. the placement of the archer at the top of the Ruthwell Cross (Schapiro 1963). However, the use of magic did not necessarily need a material representation in order to take effect. Prayers were perceived as amulets against evil, and were used to exorcise demons (Flower 1954: 91, 97). Rushton (1980: 115) believes that there are examples of the magical use of Christian symbols, in the form of prayers, relics, and parts of the 'true cross' or gospels. He holds that 'the medieval Church encouraged, or at least tolerated, the use of tokens of faith to provide magical protection for their owners. In this way the language and symbols of Christianity passed into the general pool of popular magic'.

As long as the use of magic was practised in amulet (token) form, the Church seems to have been happy to tolerate this lay requirement of belief. However, 'the Council of Ireland in 466 anathematised a Christian who believed that he was a sorcerer or who pretended to be one, and forbade him to be received in Church until he had done penance' (Garcon & Vinchon 1930: 32)⁴⁰. Focusing on the 'virtue' of the cult of relics, on the other hand, emphasises the power of God; it is not a power inherent in an individual or an object – they are merely conduits. A question that remains is whether the High Crosses can be shown to part of the cult of the saints, and to what extent they were perceived to be a conduit for this power and how was it exercised?

⁴⁰ There is a similar account in the *Life of St Mochuda* where a druid is deprived of his eyesight for a year, for denying the work of God, until he repents and does penance (trans. Power 1914: 94-95).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to identify and detail a primary component of the communication equation of the High Crosses – the context of their creation and setting that we would find their audience. To understand why the crosses were built, this discussion has illustrated three changes in Ireland at this time that needs consideration. Firstly, the social, economic and cultural changes that emerged as the result of the development of Irish monasticism, on: the church, ruling classes and lay population. Secondly, the expression of Irish monasticism and how it was able to integrate into Irish society. Thirdly, the impact of these changes we find in the archaeological record – specifically the development of the High Cross.

Understanding these issues allows for a clearer understanding of the patrons and the audience. The audience comprises of two parties that need consideration: those involved in commissioning the work and the broader viewing audience. In order to understand the audience and its requirements this chapter has sought to establish not only how and for what purpose the crosses might have been used, but also to define the context and characteristics of the audience. This has involved an exploration of the early Irish church and its development as well as the different types of viewers that might have been exposed to the High Crosses.

Contextually, the introduction of Christianity was not into a spiritual void; unfortunately, however, we know little of the pre-Christian belief system. The non-Christian belief system, in contrast to Christianity, appears to have lacked the same evidentiary material or written records or to have resulted in the same social centralisation. An understanding of the relationship between pre-existing associations with standing stones and their audience shall be investigated in detail in the following chapter. The focus of this section has been primarily on the different types of audiences, Christian and secular, that might have viewed the crosses.

There is no evidence limiting the spread of Christianity with the pace of the development of Irish monasticism. The initial conversion of Ireland appears to have been episcopally organised under the control of bishops. With the advent of monasticism in Ireland a second, possibly competitive, system of Christian practice was introduced. While Irish monasticism became dominant, there is no conclusive evidence that there were two separate church systems. Initially, the monastic traditions appear to have been eremitic following eastern inspiration, a trend that had spread earlier across the continent. While inspired by monastic practices in the east, Irish monasticism took on its own

distinctive characteristics. In remote parts of Ireland, small communities were established which set themselves apart from non-Christians. Later on, we find monasticism evolving into cenobitic monastic centres of larger settlement sizes. By the end of the eighth century, most of the Irish churches were likely to have been under monastic influence but the level of coordination, rate of consolidation and consistency of ecclesiastical government is unclear.

Part of the strength of the monastic model in Ireland was its use of and integration with the Irish kin system. Patrick was highly successful as a missionary because he utilised the pre-existing Irish kin systems, based around the *tuatha*, to convert the Irish. By converting the secular authority, he was able to quickly reach the larger population. Unlike the Episcopal system, monasticism allowed for the title of abbots to be hereditary; which might indicate the reasons for its popularity within the kin-based culture of Ireland. This also meant that the secular ruling class would have had close kin ties to the spiritual authorities. Evidence of this close relationship can be seen in the practice of local kings donating land and other benefits of increasing value to monasteries. A symbiotic relationship developed between the ruling classes and the early church where each supported the other's power-base. The High Cross as an artefact both mediating and communicating this relationship, a theme that shall be developed over the following chapters.

The growth and development of monasteries resulted in significant social and economic changes in Ireland. There was an economic restructuring from a reciprocal (kin-group) economic system to a tributary one. This process was also taking place on the continent and it resulted in a greater centralisation of trade and skills. In Ireland, it coincided with the initial developments of urbanisation and the first market places. The development of monastic centres, connected to crafts and trade, appear vital to the development of the more complex High Crosses, since the concentration of skills and wealth were necessary for their evolution into more complex forms. High Crosses are closely connected with monastic sites, and, in particular, are found prominently at the centre of the new market places.

While the High Crosses have many different purposes, as shall be discussed in the following chapter, there are some clear associations that can be inferred from this early period of monasticism. The diversity and complexity in form and symbolism of standing stones in general are illustrated in the two types of monastic settlement, cenobitic and eremitic. The more developed forms of the High Crosses reflect a considerable investment of both wealth and learning. The more simple freestanding crosses are indicative of a more austere life style. The symbolism and form of the crosses appear to be a direct expression of their settlement context.

The previous chapters have indicated that the crosses have a strong link both to the 'founder's tombs' of religious settlements and to pilgrimage. The role of some High Crosses appears to be linked to the new role of the monastery as a centre of trade and spiritual governance. The early Irish church promoted and encouraged the 'cult of saints' for spiritual, economic and political purposes. Spiritually, saints and relics were a powerful mechanism for driving missionary efforts and uniting religious communities. It should be noted that local as well as foreign saints were venerated. The importance of this is that early Christianity underwent a change of focus, away from the kin-group towards that of the family of Christ. Local saints would have at one time been kin and therefore a comprehensible link to the new Christian family. Economically, by encouraging pilgrimages, the church helped to increase trade while at the same time increasing its own opportunities to profit from these population movements, as has been detailed in this chapter. Politically, relics of saints were important for establishing their primacy with secular authorities and relations with other churches.

It is in this context we find the prominent public display of some High Crosses. However, the populations of monasteries at this time can be described as comprising various combinations of Christian, non-Christian and syncretic believers. It is likely that the patrons could have been either the monastic or the secular rulers. The following chapters will discuss some differentiation between the spiritual and secular themes on High Crosses that might indicate a collaborative monument. What is clear is that they would have been prominent declarations of the fundamentally Christian nature of the settlement.

The following chapter investigates what we know of the specific uses of crosses within different situations based on the description of the cultural context described in this chapter. Taking into consideration that audiences of different backgrounds used them, they need to be investigated as communicators on a competitive landscape, competing with non-Christian messages. Finally, what we know of cross use inside and outside the larger Christian settlements will also be taken into consideration in the following study of crosses and their contexts of use.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONTEXT AND USE OF THE CROSSES

The previous chapter described the patrons of the crosses by investigating the nature and defining features of the early Irish Church responsible for the development of the crosses. This chapter will attempt to analyse the crosses as a medium vehicle through an exploration of the context in which they were on display and in use. Establishing the nature of the context of use is central to any discussion of why the crosses were built from several perspectives. Context assists in establishing the reference point for resolving the significance of a message (Sebeok 1985: 454); especially in terms of understanding the position of the speaker in terms of their social authority (Foucault 1972: 50-52; Beaudry, et al. 1996: 280)¹. This line of enquiry will assist developing understanding of the motivations behind this choice of medium form to communicate the early Church's messages.

This study deliberately identifies all stones – that can be identified as artefacts – as standing stones. While this terminology has some non-Christian associations it will become clear that all these stones were competitive or complementary message-vehicles on the landscape at the same time. This study also makes the presumption that, while there is no evidence that High Crosses evolved from the cross-slab tradition, they would have been perceived as part of a media tradition (even if there was concurrent production of cross-slabs). The driving force behind the more complex form was the need to accommodate the expanding communication needs combining the interests of the church, possibly their patrons and their audience.

The first stone medium belonging to the early Christian period were stone-slabs. These evolved from plain slabs to those inscribed with simple details, eventually resulting in the decorated slabs, both upright and recumbent. Due to the amorphous nature of many early cross-slabs and non-Christian stones, differentiating them is dependent on their context (location) and decoration. In contrast, the Irish High Crosses would have been novel and impressive monuments on the Irish landscape, an innovative departure from preceding amorphous standing stones. However, within this context, it should be recognised that they competed with larger and more spatially oriented structures for the visual 'share-of-eye' of the landscape. It is useful to review briefly the Christian standing stone traditions.

¹ 'Context is where meaning is located and constituted and provides the key to its interpretation. Recovery of meaning is predicated on recovery of context because context not only frames meaning by tying it to actual situations and events, but it is inextricably bound up with meaning. The existence of a context implies the presence of meanings functioning within it, and, conversely, meanings cannot exist in the absence of context' (Beaudry, et al. 1996: 280).

EVOLVING USE OF THE CROSS-SLABS

The first Christian use of standing stones commenced with the recumbent-slab form, which may have originated as a burial mechanism to protect the corpse from wild beasts. Pre-Christian standing stones have been linked back to burial sites (O Ríordáin 1942: 81; HMSO 1966: 130; Charles-Edwards 1976: 83; Doherty 1985: 53; O'Sullivan and Sheehan 1996: 109-111). The pre-Christian burial practice was one of cremation; the introduction of the recumbent-slab was probably seen as practical in the transition to the Christian practice of inhumation². The change in funerary ritual would have been a powerful statement of family belief and allegiance in the early Christian period. However, the origins of this new tradition are unclear. The impetus for the recumbent-slab would have come from foreign sources³, ultimately drawing on the *sarcophagus* and *stèle* of the east. Literary sources suggest that crosses were used as grave markers from the seventh century (Hamlin 1987b: 138). The change from recumbent-slabs to upright cross-slabs might have developed to provide a decorated socket stone for upright-slabs, and there are examples where there are cut holes that could support upright markers (Mytum 1992: 97)⁴.

While the Irish slab therefore has its origins in burial practices and was commonly located within graveyards, there is some consensus that the larger freestanding slabs and crosses were not directly associated with burials (Lionard 1960: 99; Higgins 1987: 106). This is not to limit their function as markers for a general region where the dead were buried, but simply to affirm that they are not specifically associated with any one grave. This context of use means that it is unlikely that these cross-slabs and pillars were erected for an individual, but might have served a broader kin or community purpose.

The upright crosses and some freestanding slabs appear to have had a commemorative function. It has been suggested that they marked places associated with miracles or major events (Stalley 1996: 40)⁵. Small crosses with no close associations were erected to mark locations that were consecrated

² Thomas (1971: 112) believed that the primary function of the recumbent slab was to act as a grave marker.

³ Lionard (1961: 99-100) has linked the use of cross-slabs to a similar use of stone tablets with both Roman and Merovingian Gaulish graves as markers.

⁴ Some of the graves at the Iniscealtra graveyard have the dead placed in 'long cist-like graves'. These graves are like a stone coffin with rectangular slabs at the sides and one placed on top, usually inscribed with a cross. Some of these slabs have socket holes that might have been intended to support a vertical grave marker (Higgins 1987: 107; Lionard 1961: 147-149 and Pl xxvi, 2). Similar use of postholes for slabs can be found at the Reask cemetery (Mytum 1992: 97).

⁵ Monks at Iona erected a cross at the location where Columba was accustomed to rest. The Tower Cross at Kells commemorates both St Columba and St Patrick and the main crosses at Iona are all named after prominent Irish saints (Henry 1965: 136), though Robertson (1975: 111) warns that the naming of the St John's Cross, Iona is not ancient.

by bishops; the number of these crosses increased from the sixth century onwards (Lionard 1960: 136). It is important to recognise there were other more specific uses of cross-slabs. Stone slabs might have been adapted to serve as ecclesiastical furniture, e.g. as altar-slabs⁶. Due to the difficulties in identifying the precise use of cross-slabs, as a contemporary medium choice, it is useful to investigate the broader use of standing stones as media in Ireland at this time.

CROSSES AND ORIENTATION IN THE LANDSCAPE

While there are specific associations and usages of the cross-slab, it is also useful, if we are to gain a clear insight to the likely messages they communicated, to consider them as medium. The early Church's use and investment in the High Cross form demonstrates that their function within the Church developed over time. However, standing stones - as a form of medium - have in common clear cross-cultural uses that are fundamental to understanding their Christian adoption and adaptation.

Broadly, there appears to be a shared functionality of all standing stones in orientating populations on the landscape. This can be illustrated by looking at their distribution and location within settlements. While we know that most recumbent slabs were located near graveyards, freestanding crosses appear to be located in more specific functional locations⁷. However, we do not know if the crosses are still located *in situ*. Relocating a High Cross was no mean feat, but several crosses appear to have been repaired or altered at later dates and some caution must be taken in accepting their current locations as original (Veelenturf 1997:126).

⁶ Several small slabs, of a particular type, with inscribed crosses have been found only at ecclesiastical sites. Lionard (1961: 136) has suggested that they were too small to be used as altar tables by themselves, and believes that they may have covered the relic boxes cut into stone altars or inserted into wooden altars during the seventh century; although he points out that the *Council of Epaona* forbade the consecration of wooden altars in AD 517. Higgins (1987: 106) has developed this identification, that small slabs inscribed with five crosses might have been portable altar slabs. These represent flat recumbent slabs also decorated with five crosses that were used to decorate the *mensae* (tables) of the Christian altar. Higgins points out that the same crosses at Innismurray have a variable number of crosses of between three and five (three single crosses can also represent 'Christ and the Thieves' as will be discussed in a later chapter). Harbison has noted that the Cardonagh stele could have served as part of a choir screen within a wooden Irish church. This is based on the identification of a Lombardic style of cross of similar appearance in a monastery in South Germany, c. 830 AD (Baum 1958: 241-243 cited in Harbison 1986: 53). This sort of interregional identification needs some caution as a means of identifying precedents because of the large disparities between the practices of Christianity in both regions.

⁷ There is evidence that Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age communities were established at sites that were already 'sanctified by earlier generations' (Harbison 1988: 186). Since early Christian settlements were established near these settlements this is where we find the majority of Irish High Crosses. Standing stones appear to have functioned in a familiar role as markers of burial areas. Upright slabs inscribed with crosses may have marked out the boundaries of burial grounds (Stokes 1894: 7).

While we have an understanding of the main uses that can be associated with crosses, it is also necessary to have a clear understanding of both the symbolic and archaeological contexts that defined these meanings. This will help to disambiguate which developments of the cross form were Christian innovations and which were conforming to pre-existing expectations of them as a medium. Outside the Christian context, standing stones are sometimes considered symbolic of larger cosmological schemes. It has been suggested that from Neolithic times burial sites were deliberately constructed to 'dominate' the landscape (Bitel 1990: 45-46). Many of these remains would have been as prominent in Christian times as they are today⁸. They would have been recognised as places of mythic status or as active non-Christian sites. However, the original purpose of these monuments did not differ widely in intent from structures built by early Christians. As Irwin (1990: 47, his emphasis) says: 'throughout the whole ancient world the building of sacred monuments was first and foremost a *rite* by which man sought to identify himself with the source of the cosmic order. For this purpose he placed himself and his monuments at the mythical *centre of the universe*'. This process is a key feature of the crosses that assists in understanding their development. The symbolism of the cross form, with the depiction of Christ, or his symbol, at the centre, the intersection of shaft and transom, perpetuates and reinforces this function.

An important corresponding consideration when appraising the role of monuments on the landscape is the secular and social imperatives behind their construction. Monuments are rarely an individual effort or focused on influencing one person. The sheer size of many monuments points to their role

⁸ This builds up the picture of more than one stone monument on the landscape. These were both pre-Christian and Christian in origin, e.g. the landscapes in Co. Cork and Co. Kerry have⁺:

Stone Types:	Total :
✧ Stone Circles	93
✧ Boulder Burials	52
✧ Short rows of 2 to 6 stones	150
✧ Single standing stones	600
✧ Irish High Crosses (IHCPS)	6

⁺ (Ó Nualláin 1984)

This places the impact of the Irish High Crosses on the landscape within a visible context. They were in visual competition with monuments that may have had significance to a non-Christian audience. The Irish High Crosses mark a departure and innovation in the way messages were communicated to their audience.

⁹ Eliade (1958: 231-235) has described man as *umbilicus mundo* or the navel of the world in how the world is perceived. Additionally, Eliade (1959:22) suggests that man orientates himself to the universe by following the paradigmatic model of the gods recreating the universe in order to make sense of his environment. In that every construction by man has the cosmogony as its model: 'the creation of the world becomes the archetype of every human gesture, whatever its plane of reference may be' (1959:45). This is achieved either by creating the orientating symbolism of an *imago mundi* or by focusing on the centre through the *axis mundi*. Symbolic motifs that conform and reinforce these orientation symbolisms were discussed in Chapter Two. Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 14-21) are able to demonstrate that orientation metaphors are common in the way that we orientate ourselves through language. As well as many of our fundamental concepts being organised in terms of spatial metaphors, orientation metaphors also have social significance, e.g. 'High society' or in this case 'High Cross'.

as a communicator of a set of beliefs or messages. With a few exceptions, human cultures are generally hierarchical and this allows for an assumption that monuments are constructed/commissioned by the few to be seen by the many – this discourse reflecting the control of resources. This view is supported by Sadalla & Sheets (1993: 157) who hold that the ‘environment’, from a dramaturgical perspective is, ‘a collection of stage sets and props for social performances (interactions between actor and audience). Individuals are assumed to select and manipulate symbols in their environment in order to influence a social audience’. Standing stones acted as active mediators between different social groups¹⁰. The diversity and form of different monuments is thought to be influenced by their purpose, environment and architectural form (Richards 1996: 190). In discussing the Bronze Age monuments at Bodmin Moor, Cornwall, Christopher Tilley has further refined the relationship between the landscape and the social group:

The ritually and symbolically effective placing of monuments in the landscape became of vital significance in the creation, reproduction and articulation of authority, in a relationship between ritual specialists and those who were led and instructed. One of the purposes of using and visiting these monuments was to inform and sediment in the mind a sense of awe and wonder, of the significance of the place, and its ancestral connotations, the events which had taken place there and the telling of myths recanted the spirit powers inhabiting it. This entailed an ever-increasing emphasis on creating, maintaining, working and re-working an intimate network of relationships between monuments and the topography (1996: 173).

The relationship of social groups to landscape is also defined by Franses (1996: 268), who sees memorials as ‘one way in which people constitute themselves into a geographical, localised unit or community’. Considering the role and use of stones before Christianity the early Church must have seen the importance of adapting this medium – or at the very least would have sought to control their influence. It should be recalled that orientation symbolism was in use in Ireland before the introduction of Christianity.

Evidence of the Christian adaptation of the standing stones and associated meanings can be seen in the High Cross. While Tilley is discussing Bronze Age monuments, there are many parallels in the choice of location and assumed use of the Irish High Crosses. Crosses are monuments that act loosely as the biography of the life of Christ and act as a *locus* for the worship/remembrance/meditation of his life and the viewers’ place/role within a ‘family’. The administrators of this *locus* would in turn have their authority strengthened as spiritual leaders. The

¹⁰ This view is supported by Driscoll (1988:164-167) who, in his analysis of Pictish stones, came to a similar perspective on how to view these Pictish stones. These findings shall be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Irish High Crosses were significant developments compared to their Bronze Age predecessors in that they came with figurative and symbolic depictions and visual narratives that reinforced the role of the Church at the centre, as custodians and educators of Christian worship. Additionally, as shall be discussed in Chapter Six, the crosses actively reinforced the role and status of secular leaders within social discourse. What is not clear is the nature of the relationship of the High Crosses to the topography. We also do not know what meanings might have been attributed to them because of their place as actors in the landscape.

The relationship between the Church and its 'presence' on the landscape took many forms. Initially it is not unreasonable to assume there was a desire to delimit Christian areas from non-Christian ones based on physical and spiritual practicalities of worship. This would have been to accommodate the founding inspiration of monastic ideals, as discussed in the preceding chapter. Later, when the Church had a secular as well as spiritual presence, the demarcation of sacred land and economic concerns would have increased in importance. The record of the relationship between the Church and the landscape is well documented with monastic settlements often taking on names that marked them as Christian dwellings. Later parish districts were the culmination of this scheme¹¹.

Since the pre-Christian belief system was not a written one it is difficult to understand completely its relationship with the land. However, from ethnographic comparisons it is likely that certain areas such as wells and trees were associated with non-Christian beliefs. These sites are believed to mark supernatural boundaries, between the natural world and the 'other world'. The tree plays a central role as a material representation of the *axis mundi*. The tree, as cosmic axis, symbolically represents three different metaphoric regions: the branches represent heaven; the trunk the earthly realm; the roots the otherworld (Davidson 1975: 177; Eliade 1958: 232). The tree did not need to be represented in its entirety in order to be effective; from ethnographic evidence, a leaf or branch can symbolically represent the tree (Eliade 1964: 321). A pillar, for example, can be seen as a simplified or stripped tree. The pillar and the tree appear to share the same function as a cosmological mid-point of the pre-Christian world; for this reason, we find both trees and pillars associated with graveyards¹²

¹¹ Considering that we see the Irish landscape through surviving Christian records, as a result non-Christian locations are not as clearly defined. Another consideration, to be discussed, is that non-Christian landscape names might orientate the communities to the spiritual *locus* of this non-Christian belief system. We know that the early Christians used many monastic terms to re-brand the Irish topography. For example, the toponymy of Ireland has place names containing the element *disert*, the Latin *desertum*, 'the anchorite's solitary cell' (Flower 1954: 89; Schapiro 1944: 161) (see Map 15).

¹² Dinzelbacher (1986: 81) takes this association of the grave with vegetation further by suggesting that the inhabited vine-scroll ornamentation that is so popular in Anglo-Saxon art represents the journey to the otherworld, with the animals showing the role of obstacles on that journey. Interestingly, vine-scroll ornament of this type was not as popular in Irish art; the implications of this will be discussed in more detail below.

(Russell 1979: 223-226; Bryce 1989: 11; Cook 1974: 9-12). The Irish High Cross also shares some of the characteristics of an *axis mundi*, such as the way in which it is divided metaphorically into three different regions, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six¹³. It will be recalled that the Irish High Cross was also symbolic of the cross on which Christ was crucified, which in the Christian belief system was thought to be built from the Tree of Life.

In its broadest sense, 'the tree represented the annual death and rebirth of all vegetation' (Eberly 1989: 43). The tree as *axis mundi* would have signified a cosmological model of the regeneration of all life. Reno (1977: 78) envisages the tree as symbolic of one of man's most profound longings, to be at the source of life and regeneration: 'it embodies the principle of human and animal fertility'. Reno defined this in terms of relating the basic preoccupations of humans, i.e. 'concern for security, advancement and fulfilment, fear of failure and death, a desire to preserve life and recover it if lost'. One of the important factors in discussing the *axis mundi* is that this role was not limited to one tree: 'from pre-Neolithic times the tree was seen as the world-axis: its long shape makes it an axis to the centre of the world. Since each tree is an axis to the world's centre, there can be many holy trees' (Rees 1992: 66)¹⁴. This means that each community could be organised around its own axis.

As with the Irish High Cross, understanding the role of the tree is most difficult when considering its role in the interaction between the secular and spiritual worlds. Davidson (1975: 177) suggested that trees were where 'gods met to take council together and to frame laws'. In Ireland, this role appears to have been shared with secular gatherings of communities as well. Bitel (1990: 44-45) holds that 'certain trees identified sacred places where people gathered for important rituals and political assemblies; many of these sites attracted permanent settlement'. These sacred trees or *bili* were found at inauguration sites and chieftain forts. It is likely that the early church was cognisant of the significance of the trees to the non-Christian belief system. In Tírechán's *Account of St Patrick's Journey*, Patrick builds a church for the community of Ardraccan beside *Bile Torten*¹⁵ (trans. de Paor 1993:174) and there are other associations between Patrick and trees in the Journey, e.g. Patrick's Church in the *Wood of Fochloth* (trans. de Paor 1993:158); also mentioned in *St Patrick's Declaration* (

¹³ The base having secular imagery and the cross head having more divine/cosmic iconography.

¹⁴ Eliade (1958:379) earlier expressed a similar perspective of orientating structures: 'Every dwelling, by the paradox of the consecration of space and by the rite of its construction, is transformed into a "centre". Thus, all houses - like all temples, palaces and cities - stand in the selfsame place, the centre of the universe. It is, we must remember a transcendent space, quite different from the nature from profane space, and allows for the existence of a multiplicity and even an infinity of "centres".'

¹⁵ Sacred trees are afforded special status of protection in the *Ancient Laws of Ireland* (1895: 477) - which represents a tree with religious connotations being protected in the Christian era under law.

trans. de Paor 1993:100)¹⁶. Sacred trees also appear to have still had a role within ecclesiastical sites. The year 995 A.D. in the *Annals of the Four Masters* records the 'Ard-Macha was burned by lightning...and its *Fidh-neimhedh* [sacred wood], with all destruction' (trans. O'Donovan 1854: 735); also recorded in the *Annals of Tigernach*, 995 A.D. 'Armagh was burnt, both houses and stone-house and belfry, and sacred wood...' (Stokes 1993: 350)¹⁷. This would indicate that the early Christian church recognised these *bili* as competing sites of religious and social focus. The use of monuments and trees as the central focus of cults is found in other contemporary regional cultures (Davidson 1992: 27-28; 1993: 68-69) and it is likely that the Church would have been aware of this.

However, Christianity did not commonly utilise natural forms for the material symbolic expression of its belief system. Within this discussion, it is sensible to heed Davidson's warning (1993: 69-73) that the exact interpretation of the tree is difficult in Christian times. The shared symbolic associations with the New Testament, in particular regarding Christ and his crucifixion, have been discussed. There are also numerous biblical examples of trees as sources of wisdom and points (portals) of contact with divinity¹⁸, as in Celtic practice¹⁹. There are other accounts of oracular trees in the East. We also find these sacred trees depicted in art that might have found its way to the west with other artefacts, e.g. Alexander the Great was reputed to have come across a talking tree. Persian miniatures depicting the *Waq Waq* tree are found in the east (Cook 1974: Fig. 33; Baer 1965: 66-68; Russell 1981: 58-59).

Trees can also be seen as having a Christian social role. In the Bible, they are frequently mentioned as a place of justice with numerous hangings from trees described: e.g. De 21:22, 23; Jos 10:26; Ga 3:13; Ge 21:33; Ge 40:19; Isa 14:19. The Celtic reverence of the oak appears to have been shared by the early Hebrews as well; the oak is described as a burial marker in *Genesis* 35:8. In *Genesis* 12:6-8 God appeared to Abraham at Shechem's holy place, the *Oak of Moreh*, 'the revealer' – Abraham built

¹⁶ However, a consideration is that trees within an orientation context, as *axis mundi*, could have been the accepted way of describing locations rather than expressly indicating a Christian attempt to convert a non-Christian site.

¹⁷ Lucas (1963: 27-34) provides a more detailed discussion of the relationship of trees with primary ecclesiastical sites.

¹⁸ In *Samuel* CH2: 23-24 King David was given warning from trees to attack the enemy: 'And when David enquired of the Lord, he said, Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the Lord go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines'.

¹⁹ From the tenth century tale, from the *Book of Lecan, The Adventure of St Columba's Clerics* (trans. Stokes 1894b: 141) there is a passage that uses biblical imagery of birds in tree from a tale of Elijah in an Irish tale. These birds talk to the clerics.

an altar near the oak because it was viewed as sacred²⁰. There are other occurrences in *Genesis* 18:1-10, 35:1-5, and *Judges* 9:37, where the oak or a tree plays an important role in ritual²¹. This shows that the early Church had its own influential models of trees as a spiritual locus.

There are two possible explanations for the utilisation of the tree in imagery associated with standing stones. The first is that trees, standing stones and crosses are all evidence of a convergent symbolic evolution. The second and more likely, is that the Irish High Cross form was developed in Ireland to target an audience that was in some way different from audiences in other Christianised countries by using symbolic imagery it was already familiar with²². In modern marketing this is referred to as 'ambush marketing', where one copies, emulates or 'steals' features of an existing or known product in order to heighten awareness, acceptance and adoption of a new one. Using the context or characteristics of an already successful context or product heightens the ability to contact a target audience within terms of reference it understands. This would also reduce resistance to a message or barriers to understanding caused by the adoption of a medium not familiar to its intended audience.

This proactive consideration of the audience was not limited to medium choice. The context, or frame, for the setting of the medium also appears to have been adapted and developed. Pre-Christian settlements on the political and social landscape may have been based around a similar orientation - the central *locus*. It has been suggested that Irish social systems were focused at least symbolically around the *axis mundi* (Aitchison 1994: 108-109), although this focus is not limited to Irish society (Irwin 1990: 52-56). Monuments symbolic of this *axis mundi* acted as a conduit between this world and the 'otherworld'. As discussed above, it is likely that trees held a prominent role in an Irish setting as 'actors' on the landscape. This can be illustrated by looking at the relationships between

²⁰ The role and status of these sacred trees does appear to have caused some confusion within early Christianity. Socrates Scholasticus (1880:49), from his *Ecclesiastical History of the Church*, under the year A.D.331, states of Constantine: 'Again he built other churches, one of which was erected near the *Oak of Mamre*, under which the sacred oracles declare that Abraham entertained angels. For the emperor having been informed that altars had been reared under that oak, and that Pagan sacrifices were performed there, severely censured by letter Eusebius bishop of Caesarea, and ordered that the altars should be demolished, and a house of prayer erected beside the oak'.

²¹ The influence of the Old Testament and the Bible on Irish society and culture will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

²² It is interesting that the term High Cross is used to refer to the more elaborate crosses in an entry in the *Annals of the Four Masters* under the year AD 957. From the *Annals of Ulster* (1188.5) there is a passage that describes trees as 'High': 'The Foreigners of the castle of *Magh-Coba* and a party of the *Ui-Echach* of *Ulidia* came on a foray into *Tir-Eogain*, until they reached to *Leim-mic-Neill* and seized cows there. And *Domnall Ua Lochlainn* went against them with a force of his own party, until he overtook them at *Cabhan of the High Trees*. They gave them battle and it went against the Foreigners and slaughter of them was inflicted' (trans. Hennessy and MacCarthy 1887 Vol. 2, my emphasis). This might suggest that the term *High* might have originated from a term given to trees originally. From its experience on the continent, the Church would have been aware that the prime shared symbolism among any non-Christians was the concept of the world axis - which was central to its own cosmology as well.

sacred trees and their community. A poem on *Eó Mugna* (one of the five main sacred trees of Ireland) asserts that its shadow could give shelter to a thousand men and that the tree itself could shelter a hundred score of warriors plus ten hundred and forty. This tree was envisaged as being able to shelter the entire population of the tribe to which it belonged (Watson 1981: 176). Additionally, the *Rennes Dindsenchas* (trans. Stokes 1885: 279) refers to a population in direct relation to a tree as *Fir Bile* 'the men of the *Bile*'. This type of identification of a kin group with a tree reinforces the perception of the tree as central axis to a community's social and cultural identity. It would be possible to interpret the tree as a cosmological entity, capable of uniting physically all of the tribe, alive and dead. Supporting this active role, there is a description in a *dindsenchas* poem, on the *Eó Rossa* (trans. Stokes 1894a: 420), where the tree is called a 'door (?) of heaven'. This might allude to the transdimensional role of the tree in the pre-Christian belief system. The strongest property of the *axis mundi* is that it served as a link between the living and their dead kin.

Additionally, tombs also had a continued use into the Iron Age and Christian periods as a place where the dead and living could meet (Bitel 1990: 48). In medieval literature, these were referred to as *sidi* - doorways to the otherworld. Tilley (1996: 167) points out that 'past sacred powers of topographical space became incorporated in the presence of monument construction and use which served to "draw out" ancestral powers from the landscape, making them visible and providing symbolic potentiality for ...ritual control'. The inauguration of Irish kings occurred at *sidi* (Warner 1988:58). It is worth recalling that at kings were often seen as the embodiment of a tribe, this ritual role would support associations and perceptions of the wisdom of kin, though the *sidi*, being passed on to them in some way. The link between High Crosses and kings will be discussed shortly.

In pre-Christian times, the tombs of ancestors dominated the centre of a community, 'expressing a bond between the farmers, their ancestors, and their land' (Bitel 1990: 47). This changed later on that secular establishments began to accumulate around monasteries (Bitel 1990: 39). This would place the Church at the centre of the community, a place traditionally reserved for kin; the church literally would have taken over the role of the *axis mundi* to the ancestors. The effect of this and the role of standing stones within this buffer zone between kin, the dead and the church will be discussed in more detail below.

One of the key features of the Irish belief system's expression of the concept of the *axis mundi* was its organisation along cardinal points as a microcosmic representation of the *imago mundi*. This organisation is manifest in the five-fold division of Ireland into five rough social and political divisions organised around royal centres, called the *coiceda* (Map 20) (Aitchison 1994: 104-105).

Clonmacnois, Co. Offaly is the centre of these regions, the over-kingdom (Ó Floinn 1994: 251; Aitchison 1994: 105)²³. Aitchison (1994: 106) believes that these political divisions were in place before the emergence of the *Uí Neill* dynasties in the fifth and sixth centuries AD. This would place the use and symbolism of the *coiceda* division before the introduction of Christianity²⁴. The *coiceda* division was also reflected in the mythical placement of the sacred trees of Ireland. Five trees were associated with legendary or historical kings: *Eó Mugna*, *Bile Dathi*, *Bile Torton*, *Eó Rossa* and *Craeb Uisnig*²⁵. In the *dindsenchas* of *Temair Luachra*, four of these sacred trees appear at the birth of *Conn Cétchathach* - the king who, according to tradition, united the separate regions of Ireland for the first time (Watson 1981: 169)²⁶. In a later tenth or eleventh century story, *On the Settling of the Manor of Tara*, the five *bile* grew from berries from the Otherworld tree (trans. Best 1910)²⁷, which reinforces the connection between the king and his ancestors as the trees were connected to inaugurations (Lucas 1963: 42, 16; Plummer 1910: clii)²⁸.

Notably, the *Uí Neill* dynasty claimed to be descendents of *Conn* and have been linked epigraphically to several of the Irish High Crosses (Harbison 1999). The sacred sites at Tara and *Uisnech* are believed to have a cosmological significance that embraced the whole island in an attempt to recreate

²³ It is interesting to reflect on O Riain's (1972: 29) definition of Irish settlements being typically on boundaries in this context. He suggests that in the Irish case the importance of the centre – or over-kingdom- is not that it represents the cosmic centre but the cosmic confine. In his view, it marks the point where the five kingdoms meet – the centre defined by being enclosed by the other divisions.

²⁴ Byrne (1973: 64) holds that the division was non-Christian with *Uisneach* being the umbilical centre of Ireland. It was at *Uisneach* that the five fifths were joined in the Druidic fire ceremony of *Beltaine*.

²⁵ Descriptions of the five sacred trees are recorded in the *Rennes Dindsenchas* (trans. Stokes 1885: 278): 'The Tree of Ross and the Tree of Mugna and the Ancient Tree of Dathé and the Branching Tree of Uisnech and the Ancient Tree of Toru – five trees are those'.

²⁶ The *Rennes Dindsenchas* (trans. Stokes 1894a: 420) reports that *Eo Mugna* appeared as the 'greatest of oaks' at the birth of *Conn*: 'Now it was for a long while hidden until the birth of *Conn* of the Hundred Battles (when it was revealed).' Also recorded in *The Martyrology of Oengus* (trans. Stokes 1905: 259) December 11th, '*Mughna* a great sacred tree, and its top was as broad as the whole plain. Thrice a year did it bear fruit: it remained hidden from the time of the Deluge until the night on which *Conn* of the Hundred Battles was born, and then it was made manifest. Thirty cubits was the girth of that tree, and its height was three hundred cubits'.

²⁷ From *The Setting of the Manor of Tara* these trees are believed to come from the berries of a branch that is carried by *Trefuilingid Tre-ochair* and are given to *Fintan*, son of *Bóchra*. (trans. Best 1910: 151). Linking *Conn* directly to his ancestors through the trees but also confirming his right to rule.

²⁸ Furthermore, kings can be directly linked to standing stones and through metaphor to being the *axis mundi* for their community. From the *Battle of Mag Rath Here* is an interesting passage that states: 'Tara, noble the abode, For every king, if you but reckon them: around whom – good the prop, the chief of every territory takes his place' (trans. Marstander 1911: 233). Marstander translates the word *aige* as 'a pillar, post, stay', which he believes, is 'used metaphorically of the King of Tara as prop of his people'. Calling the king a pillar can also be linked to the Stone of *Fál*, Tara is located in the plain of *Fál* and is the centre of the state, which is directly linked to being able to recognise the king of Ireland by calling out. This is recorded in the *Rennes Dindsenchas*, where '*Fál* beside the mountain of Hostages on the north, to wit, the stone that used to roar under the feet of every King that would take possession of Ireland' (trans. Stokes 1894: 285). This reinforces the orientation of the community to the king but also to the king as metaphor for the *axis mundi*.

the cosmos (Doherty 1985: 45)²⁹. The trees signified the centre of each region and the centre of Ireland was signified by a pillar stone at *Uisneach* (Watson 1981: 169; Byrne 1973:64)³⁰. Aitchison has studied the importance of cardinal orientation in Irish monasteries and royal centres. He says:

‘Cardinal orientation is common to many religious sites. Orientation creates a sense of order within religious complexes ...and, by formalising spatial divisions, reinforces cognitive distinctions between spatially discrete areas. Orientation is fundamental to the symbolism of religious centres. It secures the centre within the cosmos, locating and harmonising it within its mundane setting. Moreover, orientation harnesses those cosmic and spiritual powers which are perceived to enter the world through the *axis mundi*, diffuse throughout the enclosure, and flow towards the cardinal points’ (1994: 235).

The quincuncial patterns in Christian symbolism are analogous to existing pre-Christian symbolism and would have given it a heightened resonance in early Christian times. The main artistic expression of this was the placement of Christ at the centre of the cross (four cardinal dimensions) and depictions of the five wounds of Christ – evidence of Christ’s transformation into his divine form. The symbolic expression of this motif is commonly depicted as the *crux gemmata* – variations of this central symbol were discussed in Chapter Two.

This fivefold division is also present in other social and political power representations in early Ireland. Davidson (1992: 27) and Aitchison (1994: 109) draw attention to the organisation of great halls of the Irish royal families reflecting this pattern. In *The Feast of Dún na nGéd* there is a passage that directly describes this:

And he designed seven great ramparts about that fort after the manner of Tara of the kings, and he designed even the houses for the fort after the manner of the houses of Tara: namely, the great Central Hall, where the king himself used to abide with kings and queens and *ollams* all that were best in every art; and the Hall of Munster and the Hall of Leinster and the Banquet-Hall of Connacht and the Assembly-Hall of Ulster (trans. Dillon 1946: 56).

²⁹ Rees and Rees (1973: 160-163) suggest that Tara was the centre of political power but *Uisneach* might have once equalled it in prestige. However, they discuss in detail the differences in orientation with *Uisneach* orientated around five provinces at the centre and Tara organised around four. They suggest that Tara orientation was closer to the Christian city of Jerusalem because of this cardinal orientation.

³⁰ Giraldus Cambrensis refers to this as ‘the navel of Ireland, as it were, placed right in the middle of the land’ (trans. O’Meara 1982: 96, section 88). Elaide (1958: 232) clarifies the role of the *omphalos* or ‘navel’, as stones that gain their importance as witnesses to rituals.

The *Book of Lecan* also provides a plan that 'has more pretensions to architectural detail (Murray 1979: 94) (Figs 212, 213)³¹. Aitchison (1994: 111) believes that these accounts attest to '...a cosmological phenomenon, the spatial mapping of political relationships of dominance and dependency and their reproduction as a microcosm'. However, Murray has cautioned, 'these illustrate a poem which gives a brief and exaggerated description of the building and relates the order of precedence of people inside...The details which can be identified may depict twelfth-century features and cannot be used as primary evidence for the pre-Norman period' (1979: 93-94).

Another interesting organisation of people, relative to spatial patterns, is that of the Stowe Missal (AD 800) where the Eucharistic wafer (representing Christ's body on the cross) is broken into fractions on a paten. O Dwyer has created a diagram that demonstrates the placement of the particles on the paten. These particles correspond to the organisation of the congregation around the form of a cross in a circle (Fig. 194). The confractio at Easter and Christmas resembles in O Dwyer's reconstruction a ringed-headed cross (O Dwyer 1981: 153-157). Furthermore, this is independently supported by Power's (1940: 25-30, PLV) earlier identification of that the decorations of a quern-stone (a ringed cross with segments) represented a similar breakdown based on the description of the Stowe Missal (see Fig. 250). This might have been used to create the Eucharistic wafer.

The use of this symbolism might have extended as far as settlement planning. Aitchison has suggested that the early medieval city of Armagh is the apex of this evolution around an *axis mundi* from older times:

The symbolic nature of the spatial organisation of early medieval Armagh is evident from the principal features it exhibits and the concepts which these embody: cardinal orientation, boundaries, restriction of access, the Centre, *axis mundi* and *imago mundi*...There is considerable evidence for cardinal orientation within the ecclesiastical topography of early medieval Armagh.

The fundamental element of Armagh's spatial organisation is the major axis which bisects the

³¹ From the *Battle of Mag Rath Here*: 'The feast of Tara is celebrated by Domnall son of Aed son of Ainmire, and these are the three feasts of Ireland: The feast of Emain, the feast of Tara and the feast of Cruachain. And he summoned the men of Ireland to his feast at Tara. A couch was prepared for Domnall in the midst of the royal palace at Tara and afterwards the host was seated. The men of Munster in the southern quarter of the house. The men of Connaught in the western part of the house. The men of Ulster in the northern. The men of Leinster in the eastern side of it. The centre of Ireland around Domnall in that house. Thus was the court made. The King of Leinster on the couch opposite in the east, the King of Munster on his right hand, the King of Connaught at his back, the King of Ulster on this left hand' (trans. Marstrander 1911: 233). Another example of cardinal orientation is found in the later *Renees Dindsenchas* where the Fort of Loeguire son Níall is described as: 'There are four doors facing the cardinal points, and Loeguire's body with his shield and spear, was set in the outer south-easterly rampart of Loeguire's royal fort at Tara, with his face to the south, fighting against Leinster...' (trans. Stokes 1894a: 284).

ecclesiastical settlement from east to west. In addition, the radial boundaries, which emanate from the boundary of the inner enclosure (north and south) and the *Ráith* (east and west) (1994: 233).

He (1994: 255-256) believes it was the intention that Armagh should share with Jerusalem the perception that it was the centre of the world and universe³². He provides a detailed discussion justifying the connection of the organisation of Armagh with the orientation of Jerusalem³³.

The connection between the ringed cross form and spatial orientation has been discussed briefly in terms of cross symbolism in Chapter 2. Associated with this symbol was a Roman tradition that a pole was placed at a central point after the augur established the *témenos* (also described in Chapter Two) that was represented by orientating a settlement or camp to the heavens by the symbolism of a cross-in-circle (Figs 196, 197). In Roman military camps this was where the *praetorium* – camp staffs headquarters was established (Rykwert 1976: 48). In the early phases of Irish monasteries we find the positioning of crosses close to the churches – or perhaps that can be phrased the other way around. Aitchison includes within his plan of orientation of Armagh city not only the churches, ‘generally east and west’, but also says, ‘that there is some evidence for the cardinal orientation of some High Crosses within this microcosmic representation’ (Aitchison 1994: 235). A cardinal interpretation of the Irish High Crosses has also been suggested indirectly by Thomas (1981) who thought the change in Christian times from round to square or rectangular dwellings³⁴ was an attempt to copy the four

³² This is inline with orientation symbolism: ‘At a closer examination, the dialectic of sacred spaces and, above all, of the “centre”, seems to be contradictory. One collection of myths, symbols and rituals agree in stressing the difficulty of entering a “centre” without coming to grief; and yet there is a whole further set of myths, symbols and rituals which make it clear that the centre is quite easy to access. Pilgrimage to Holy Places is difficult, but any visit to any church is a pilgrimage...The journey to the “centre” is fraught obstacles, and yet every city, every temple, every house is at the centre of the universe’ (Eliade 1958: 382).

³³ An illustration of the cardinal orientation of Jerusalem is detailed in *De Locis Sanctis* (11 trans. Meehan 1958: 57) where Adomnán discusses a high column that was erected in the market square to mark where a young man was bought back to life after having the true cross placed upon him. He explains that the lack of shadow at a certain time of year proves that Jerusalem is at the centre of the world. Eliade (1959:43) also identifies this primary symbolism with Jerusalem: ‘Palestine, Jerusalem, and the Temple severally and concurrently represent the image of the universe and the Centre of the World’. Additionally, from the tenth century tale, from the *Book of Lecan, The Adventure of St Columba’s Clerics* (trans. Stokes 1894b: 145), a description of the throne of God uses this cardinal orientation for descriptions: ‘If anyone were gazing at Him, from east and from west, from south and from north, he would find on every side God’s glorious face, more radiant than the sun’.

³⁴ The change to rectangular constructions is linked to the introduction of Christianity (Thomas 1981; Bitel 1990: 72), though it has been suggested that the use of rectangular buildings in Ireland predates the introduction of Christianity (HMSO 1966: 115). However, Murray (1979: 82) also sees the change in dwelling shape as heralding Christian belief and practice in Ireland. Raleigh Radford (1977) has linked the origins of this rectangular trend to the introduction of early churches. Fanning (1981: 150) has demonstrated that rectangular buildings found at Church Island and *Leacanabuaille* were built after the round dwellings. The change after Christianity is also evident from the legal texts where there is a change of one measure for a dwelling (radius) to more dimensions to account for a rectangular building (Melia 1982: 368). This linear architecture would have facilitated the better orientation of buildings and churches along east-west lines. Graves also appear to have followed the orientation of the Churches along an east-west line, e.g. at Knockea, Co. Limerick (O’Kelly 1967: 76) and Reask, Co. Kerry (Fanning 1981: 150).

arms of the cross, which he believes, was the central message of Christianity, bringing the dweller into alignment with Christ³⁵.

It is important to bear in mind the importance of the kings and their relationship to the *axis mundi* as patrons of Irish High Crosses. The orientation and foundation of any settlement would have been on the authority of a king. As has been stated above the sacred tree has been intimately associated with the inauguration of the king. The tree has also been seen as the conduit of sacred wisdom that the king used to govern (Watson 1981: 170). We might assume that to some extent this might be an allusion to the collective wisdom of the ancestors via this doorway to the otherworld. Irish kings were often anointed with hazel branches that were seen as sources of wisdom³⁶ – nourished by the waters of the sacred wells (Watson 1981: 177). The poets who inaugurated and officiated for the kings gained their powers from the same source (Watson 1981: 168). As discussed above, the poets both inaugurated and maintained the right of a king to rule in an oral culture. This shows that the ruling strata of Irish society embraced the *axis mundi* as an integral part of their identity and definition. Artefacts that were representative of the *axis mundi*, such as trees, stones or standing stones, would have had an active and central role in reinforcing and mediating this social order. Standing stones in their own right are closely linked to inauguration sites such as *Magh Adhair*, Co. Clare and at Tara (Ó Ríordáin 1942: 81). We also know that, in the eighth century, royal families were patrons of Clonmacnois and in return were buried within monastery grounds as a privilege (Ó Floinn, 1994: 252). This privilege located them closer to the *axis mundi* and kin at death. Any item that was to replace this role between the king and priest would have to be similar and easily integrated so as not to threaten the *status quo*. If Aitchison's views are correct and Armagh was constructed to reinforce this symbolism then the Irish High Crosses should show similar developments.

THE IRISH HIGH CROSS: ORIENTATION AS CONTEXT

The Armagh Irish High Crosses are the Armagh North and South Crosses; the Market Cross on an east-west axis; and the base of a broken cross known as St Patrick's cross to the west. The Market cross used to be at the entrance of the eastern enclosure, as attested in the *Annals of Ulster* (ca. 1166)

³⁵ Kilbride Jones (1986: 10) also has linked the decoration of standing stones with a cardinal orientation saying of the 'quadripartite one of scrolled palmettes' of the Cross-slab at Ardamore, Chorca Dhuibhne, that the 'four palmettes were set down at the four points of the compass', suggesting a cardinal orientation of ornament (Fig. 195).

³⁶ The use of hazel in combination with knowledge and leadership can also be found in Christian sources. Gregory of Nyssa, from *On the Baptism of Christ*, identifies the rod of Moses as being a 'hazel wand' (trans. Schaff and Wace 1979: 519)

which mention *crois-do-suir-Ratha* (cross of the door of the *Ráth*) (trans. Hennessey and MacCarthy 1893: 153). Aitchison (1994: 224) has identified a similar relationship between Irish High Crosses to the east of an ecclesiastical enclosure and a wide street or market square at the ecclesiastical settlements at Kells, Tuam and Downpatrick.

It is possible that the cardinal positioning of crosses was following examples from the gospels. There are many possible meanings associated with the 'door' in the Bible. The use of gates, walls, bars and doors are mentioned frequently elsewhere in the Bible (De 3:5; Jos 6:25; Isa 23:7; 2Sa 23:7; 2CH 8:5). The gates were seen as a place around which meetings would congregate (Ge 23:10; PR 1:21; PR 8:3; Jer 14:2; Jer 22:2), where public issues were debated (Ge 34:20) and where public transactions and announcements were made (Ge 23:10, 16). There are also examples of gates and entrances used for secular justice. Laws were read at the gates (Ne 8:1-10) and there are other examples of the courts of justice being held at entrances (De 16:18; De 21:19; De 22:15; Jos 20:4; Ru 4:1; 2Sa 15:2; PR 22:22; Zec 8:16). The punishment of criminals and breakers of law was outside gates (Jer 20:2; 2Ki 10:8).

Interestingly, the Bible also describes the thrones of kings being at the gates (1Ki 22:10; 2CH 18:9; Jer 28:7; De 17:5; Jer 20:2; Ac 7:58; Heb 13:12). However, one must be cautious when considering information from the Bible because it is uncertain how much access early Irish communities had to the Old Testament and to what extent it affected the social and legal practices within a monastery. We know that the early Irish legal scholars were familiar with using Old Testament passages for citations in early legal texts (Breatnach 1984: 458; Ó Corráin 1984a: 394-5; Doherty 1985: 57, Stevenson 1989: 161). Culturally there appears to be the same modelling. McNally (1969: 6) believes there is a strong connection between the Irish communities and Jewish traditions: 'the Irish under the inspiration of Holy Scripture began to parallel themselves on the Jewish people of the Old Law. They regarded themselves as a chosen race, therefore; and in the person of their St Patrick (d.461), confronting the Irish king Laoghaire at Tara, they saw a new Moses and a new Pharaoh; they experienced a new liberation and became a new nation'³⁷. Perceptually, this indicates a close relationship between this Bible imagery and literary cultural identity.

Our knowledge of the location of High Crosses within settlements is not comprehensive³⁸. The only surviving plan of an early medieval monastery that might shed light on the location of the Irish High

³⁷ Hennig (1949) has discussed the connection between Moses and Patrick in detail. More information on the use of the Old Testament in relation to Old-Irish laws is discussed in more detail by Ó Corráin (1984), Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen (1984b) and Breatnach (1984). The 'nativist' debate over the styles of literature of this time shall be discussed in more detail in the communication chapter.

³⁸ The original location and orientation of many crosses is still uncertain (Veelenturf 1997:126)

Crosses is the much-debated colophon from the terminal page of the *Book of Mulling*. This has been dated to the ninth or mid-ninth century and is thought to have served as a private gospel book, due to the thirteen devotional hymns located below the diagram (Nees 1983: 87). Stevick (1991: 27) places it in the same programme of illumination as the *MacDurnan, Lindisfarne, Durrow, Echternach, St Gall and Kells Gospels*; i.e. from the late seventh to early ninth centuries (Edwards 1990: 152-155). At this time, the production of the Irish High Crosses was starting to increase.

Scholarly opinion is polarised as to whether this is an accurate depiction of a monastery or if was more symbolic in nature. The *Book of Mulling* plan shows crosses located to the north, east, south and west on a circular monastery plan. Herity (1987a: 121-123) has suggested 'there is good reason to hold that many High Crosses were sited close to the boundaries of monastic enclosures in the manner suggested in the stylised plan in the *Book of Mulling*'. He believes that the North and South Crosses at Castledermot fit this model. 'There is good reason to believe that at *Dísert Diarmada*, as at other sites, a circle passing through the North and South Crosses may approximate to the contemporary boundary of the site'. The use of the *Book of Mulling* plan to throw light onto the positioning of crosses has been discussed in detail by Aitchison (1994: 234) who sees the plan as showing the positioning of crosses within an Irish monastery. He suggests that 'the pairs of crosses are orientated on the intermediate cardinal points, while the location of the cardinal points are marked outside the circle'. However, Nees (1983: 85) calls for caution in viewing the diagram as a depiction of an actual monastery, as in his view the diagram is ambiguous and can only be interpreted in 'general terms'. He believes that the closest extant parallel is the colophon drawing in the Carolingian *Plan of St Gall* (AD c.820). It 'could only be taken to be a highly schematic plan, a sort of recording or evocation of a monastery' (Nees 1983: 70)³⁹. Nees believes that it did not attempt to reproduce an accurate plan of an actual site, but it did intend a connection between the colophon drawing and the layout of the scribe's own monastery. These doubts cast a shadow over the associations Aitchison makes with the sketch. Furthermore, Nees (1983: 73-74) makes another point that would lead us away from making a direct association with an Irish monastery, which is that the crosses in the colophon are dedicated to evangelists or prophets, a practice unknown in Ireland. There is also no evidence that any Irish crosses were named after any Old Testament gospel figures. Harbison (1992: 352) also concludes that the crosses from the book are dedicated to the prophets of

³⁹ Alternatively, Pochin Mould (1964: 256) has suggested that the diagram can be linked to Colga Ó Duinechda's *Broom of Devotion*: 'I beseech with you, holy Jesus, your four Evangelists who wrote your divine gospel, Mathew, Mark, Luke, John. I beseech with out, your four 'chief prophets who foretold your Incarnation, Daniel and Jermias and Isaia and Ezechial'. Pochin Mould notes that Colga died in 796 AD. This would place the poem within a timeframe to influence the depiction. However, this interpretation does not account for the positioning of the crosses.

the Old Testament and the Four Evangelists. These were erected at the four cardinal points of the monastery, those relating to the Holy Spirit being inside the monastery.

Nees (1983: 76-84) identifies the origins of the diagram in the tradition of the ideal city, St John's Heavenly Jerusalem of the Apocalypse⁴⁰. Alternatively, Aitchison (1994: 234) argues that because the *Book of Mulling* depiction is circular, rather than square, it shows a celestial city. The earth at this time was perceived as square and the cosmos was circular⁴¹. Furthermore, a distinction which the *axis mundi* brings to a religion is that it makes the focus more cosmic (Irwin 1990: 47) and High Crosses, having both cosmic and divine associations (Richardson 1984a: 128), might be moved more into this context⁴². In Aitchison's (1994: 236) view, the plan represents the perfect city from an Irish perspective, 'emphasising the location of the boundary and the intermediate cardinal orientation of the (presumably High) Crosses and their dedications, rather than, as in Revelation, the gateways'. He suggests that this might be why the gateways are not dedicated to the Irish saints.

An interesting issue raised by the colophon drawing is its silence concerning standing stones which are not considered part of the Irish High Cross class. We know that many cross-slabs are found inside and outside of boundary walls, or helped to form boundaries, but these are not shown in the diagram. While Aitchison's argument that the colophon diagram represents an Irish monastery is not entirely compelling, it is clear that the location of crosses on cardinal points around the settlement boundary supports his assumptions about some crosses being cardinally positioned.

The consistent positioning of the High Crosses at cardinal locations must have had clearly defined associations. Nees (1983: 85) believes that ultimately the *Book of Mulling* drawing had a more talismanic or apotropaic function than as a representation of an actual monastery. This is supported by Edwards (1990: 107), who states it was, 'a more abstract, visual evocation asking for the

⁴⁰ This is based on a description in *Revelations* 21: 10-17, 'And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. (my emphasis)'

⁴¹ It should be noted that ecclesiastical sites in Ireland generally have round boundaries (Fanning 1981: 68, 150-151). A consideration is these sites might also be using the same symbolism as the *Book of Mulling*.

⁴² Chapter Two of this study has covered the importance of the circular design of the Irish High Cross wheel head being cosmic compared to square (the shape of the base) which meant the secular realms of the earth.

protection of the monastery by representing the symbols of that protection'. Harbison (1992: 352) also suggests that 'those [crosses] outside the wall may well have had an apotropaic or protective purpose, while those within the wall of the monastery showing 'Christ with Apostles' or (Christ?) 'with angels from above', and possibly (the *Magi* or donors?) 'with gifts' may have had a more didactic function, silently urging the beholder to reflect on the religious content of the illustrations of the crosses'. This gives the impression that the crosses have a defined warding function. It is not clear if the crosses protected by virtue of a semi-magical power or because of the secular authority that they symbolised.

CROSSES AND SPATIAL BOUNDARIES

It is not surprising that symbolic depictions of the active role of a cross to mark or delimit boundaries would have had connotations of protection. The High Cross form in its own right has been identified as a symbol of protection and power, as has been discussed above. The Irish High Crosses are thought to have provided protection against secular or supernatural forces (Hamlin 1987b: 138; Edwards 1990: 164). Primary evidence such as the poem, *An crosradhach Colum Chill*, 'the crosses' prayer of St Columba' by Murgon, Abbot of Iona (956-81) suggests the importance of the cross of protection (trans. Murphey 1956: 32-34).

Another aspect of the crosses not generally taken into account is that particular iconographic themes or ornaments with specific symbolic patterns might have been organised to protect, welcome and warn visitors at these junctures. This assumption would of course have the pre-condition that the visitor would understand the particular arrangement of the ornament on the crosses. This might not be the case if the purpose of the decoration was to act as a protective ward. Generally, the more esoteric a symbol of warning and protection, the greater its power, as long as it conforms to some basic theme. The original meaning of a symbol does not have to be perceived as long as the current associations were familiar. The cross symbol is an example of this concept: regardless of its variation in Ireland, a glance would have let the local community know that it was part of Christian belief. It is reasonable to assume that there were other symbols, or thematic combinations, that would have stood for specific coded messages. This is discussed further in the following chapter.

At a more general level, the use of stones as spatial markers was not a new concept to the Irish. We know that *ogam* were placed on stones in order to act as mortuary and property markers, a practice that is believed to have had non-Christian origins or usage, as will be discussed in more detail below. There are numerous examples of plainer cross-slabs acting as markers that delimited boundaries and

identified paths. For example, it has been suggested that slabs, such as slab 58 from Templemacduagh, Co. Galway, might have served as *termon* markers delimiting boundaries in settlement areas (Higgins 1987: 67)⁴³. This practice was not limited to Ireland: Welsh standing stones were used as monastic markers⁴⁴ and there are English examples⁴⁵.

To some extent, this practice of using cross-slabs might have been important to the early church to differentiate its territories as part of its orientation to the topography. Stones carved with simple crosses were erected from the sixth century and served as boundary markers, route markers or were found in Christian settlements (Mytum 1992: 69). It is also possible that isolated stones have been converted to Christian use by marking them with crosses e.g. an aniconic pillar from Cape Clear, Co. Cork (Edwards 1997: 109). However, this relationship between secular land ownership and religious declaration has been questioned. Higgitt (1986: 141-142), in discussing the Welsh stones, reports that the inscriptions on the slabs describe them as a gift to the Church. He believes that it is strange that land gifts are inscribed onto a monument celebrating 'Christ's Passion'. However, as shall be discussed, it would appear that the crosses were able to communicate several types of messages at the same time⁴⁶. In the discussion of the cross symbolism in the preceding chapter it is clear that the cross was a versatile symbol and unlikely to have been limited to one meaning. This ability to be a vehicle for more than one message becomes more complex in the case of the High Crosses.

Even a consistency in the crosses' location may not indicate the true purpose of their positioning. There is an inherent risk in trying to extrapolate trends with such a diverse sample of artefacts, e.g. a cross recorded next to a roadside at Iona, might appear to be a boundary marker of the roadway. However, the island legend is that Colmille, in the last years of his life while close to the monastery rested midway and this site was remembered. This resting place was later commemorated with a cross placed on top of a millstone. The primary function of the cross was memorial or

⁴³ The large number of bases without crosses in Ireland may have recorded land grants that had been abolished and hence their marker 'wooden or stone' was removed, leaving only the bases. Non-Irish and Irish symbolism and practices that marked boundaries and *termon*'s were discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

⁴⁴ Higgitt (1986: 141-142) has identified specific Welsh standing stones as representative (*Merthyr* 240 and *Ogmore* 255).

⁴⁵ Stone crosses have also been used to mark roadways in Britain. In Cornwall, some 600 stone crosses have been found. These were 'normally set up as a guide post to mark ancient paths and tracks to and from parish churches or to other important ecclesiastical sites, such as ancient chapels, holy wells and baptisteries. Sometimes these routes continued from parish to parish, forming long-distance routes...' (Langdon 1995: 182).

⁴⁶ At a functional level there is no reason why crosses could not have functioned as boundary markers as well as marking pathways (Langdon 1995: 182). If we recall O Riain's (1972) identifications of roads being boundaries this placement of standing stones would make sense.

commemorative rather than as a delimiter⁴⁷; additionally, by its nature would later have marked the destination of a pilgrimage route.

This suggests that the Irish High Crosses were components of a boundary and not objects that functioned alone. They were part of a larger symbolic nexus to which they collaboratively performed a role and should not be seen as acting in isolation⁴⁸. This can be illustrated by looking at some of the scenes that are displayed on the High Crosses. A scene on the Cross of Scriptures (Fig. 202), Clonmacnois has been identified as showing a delineation of the ecclesiastical boundary by the planting of a stake by a cleric (left), identified as St Ciarán, and a highborn layperson (right), presumably *Diarmait mac Cerbaill*, of the *Sil nÁedo Sláine*, High King of Ireland (Doherty 1985: 65; Edwards 1990: 100; Aitchison 1994: 275-278). Another example is found on the St Tolas Cross (Dysert O’Dea Cross) on the east face (Aitchison 1994, Fig. 64 - north face in Harbison 1992, Cat. 91) that has two figures (Figs 203 & 204). Aitchison offers examples from the shafts of crosses at Dysert O’Dea, Co. Kilkenny and a lintel stone from Cardonagh, Co. Donegal which he believes is a re-enactment of the delineation of an ecclesiastical boundary. Bitel (1990: 46) has also proposed that ‘sacred space’ was delimited by stone crosses and not by physical walls⁴⁹.

The secular significance of this scene is very important in understanding the role of the High Crosses. Symbolically, the use of the crozier was to evoke the authority of God. When Christ is depicted with a crozier he is generally depicted as Christ the Judge (Henry 1963: 82-83). This legal aspect of Christ is re-enacted by the bishop and bonds the secular king and his realm to the spiritual king⁵⁰. The establishment of cities and land boundaries is also mentioned in a similar fashion in the Bible (2Sa 8:2; Jer 31:39; Eze 40:3; Re 21:16), where a *reed* is used to measure out the boundaries for a

⁴⁷ Napier (1992: xv) records a practice that still occurs today, where every year on the Feast of the Ascension, at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, the boundary markers of the parish are thrashed. The markers are crosses and while the ‘beating of the bounds’ occurs, a prayer is said and a choir sings a song. It would not be unreasonable to assume that the boundary crosses would have involved some ritual on a regular basis to reinforce their ‘presence’.

⁴⁸ As Aitchison (1994: 280) puts it: ‘High Crosses...are monuments. In their commemoration and evocation of the ritual marking of an ecclesiastical boundary, they refer to the past and make a specific statement about the past: that the sanctity and status of a church and its *termon*, in terms of their foundation by a prominent saint, are firmly rooted in – indeed, are a product of - the past’.

⁴⁹ Boundaries in Ireland could also be marked by natural features of the landscape, such as fences, hedges or stones which makes identifying them in the archaeological record difficult (Groenman-van Waateringe 1981; Ó Riain 1972: 16).

⁵⁰ The discussion of the preceding chapter on the close relationship between the ruling classes and the church should be recalled here. Supporting this is an account from *The Life of St Mochuda*, which indicates that the handing over of land was a public occasion: ‘Thereupon, in the presence of many witnesses, the King handed over the land...’ (trans. Power 1914: 139). This might suggest that the iconographic scenes could be recording this public event as a commemoration.

city⁵¹. Additionally, a seventh-century Irish legal tract confirms this was an early Irish practice; recording the duties of a king, who should know about the 'valuation of lands, measurement by poles; augmentations of a penalty, larceny of tree-fruit; the great substance of land law: marking out [fresh] boundaries, planting of stakes, the law as to points [of stakes], partition among co-heirs, summoning of neighbours, stone pillars of contest fighters who fasten [title]...from a king (?); the extent of protection; right [of the *fine*?] up to the sixth man in movables and land' (trans. Binchy 1971: 156-7). Bishops were also involved in the measurement and division of inherited properties (Ó Cróinín 1995: 89). This would imply that the role of the king and bishop were integral to the administration of property, which also affects the way that standing stones would have been viewed, either as communicators of visual declarations of land demarcations or as active delimiters and mediators of boundaries themselves.

It is informative to look at other examples of depictions on crosses that might conform to this imagery. There are scenes that might be grouped with this imagery on the west shaft cross-decorated slab from Fahan, Co.Donegal; right east arm head fragment from Galloon, Co.Fermanagh; west shaft broken cross from Kells, Co.Meath, at Clones, Co. Monaghan; right south arm composite cross - head from Clones, Co.Monaghan that all might be seen as possible 'delineation' scenes. They all involve figures positioned centrally around a pillar or cross. However, it might also be possible to look at less secular figurative iconography for a continuation of this demarcation theme.

There is a famous Irish account of this practice of demarcating land. From the *Life of Patrick*, it states, 'The way in which Patrick measured the *ráth* was this: the angel before him and Patrick behind the angel, with his household and Ireland's elders, and Jesu's staff (*bachall isu* - a reference to a crozier) in Patrick's hand...In this wise, then, Patrick measured the *ferta* namely, seven score feet, in the enclosure (*lis*) and seven and twenty feet in the great house and seventeen feet in the kitchen and seven feet in the oratory; and in that wise it was that he used to found cloisters always' (trans. Stokes 1887, i .237). In essence this account is similar to what has been discussed above. Doherty (1985: 50) provides two possible interpretations of this scene, saying that this 'measuring pole' could have been a *forrach* used to mark off the land, or alternatively the pole could have been a *rigid*, a word which is associated with 'protection'⁵². He suggests that this was used to mark an area of protection

⁵¹ The Roman practice of the augur establishing the *termon* as a settlement boundary has been described above. Furthermore, a king's role of demarcating land and boundaries has a long tradition in the east (Rykwert 1976: 193).

⁵² Doherty (1985) provides a detailed discussion on the language usage at this time to demarcate areas.

or sanctuary⁵³. We can find other examples of Irish saints who are described marking out boundaries. One is provided by Cogitosus, (second quarter of the seventh century) who reports, 'In its suburbs, which Saint Brigit had marked out by a definite boundary, no human foe or enemy attack is feared; on the contrary, together with all its outlying suburbs it is the safest city of refuge in the whole land of the Irish for all fugitives, and the treasures of kings are kept there' (trans. Connolly and Picard 1987: 26, LSB 32: 9).

This thesis has already drawn attention to the close correlations between eastern and Irish practices, and there are further indications of eastern influence in this account of St Patrick that have not been discussed. An interesting association can be made between this scene with Patrick and the incident of Constantine founding Constantinople. There are parallels that suggest that this might be more than a literary coincidence⁵⁴. Constantine consecrated, or 'founded', his city in AD 326 or 328, in emulation of the city of Rome⁵⁵. To condense the myth of the founding he initially planned to create his new city on the site of Troy, which was the mother city of Rome, but was told in a vision (by God?) to build on the site of ancient Byzantium instead. In discussing the primary literary sources of this event, Burch states that it:

indicates his knowledge of the legend in the form where the marking out of the walls follows the account of his emulation of Romulus. It is to be expected that the attached piece about the building of a city on a Trojan site, near the tomb of Ajax, is Sozomen's manner of recording that the legend of Constantine's plotting of his city had two lines of development - a Romulus or pagan line and a Christological line. Philostorgius will serve to mark more clearly these two early phases of the story's development. This historian omits the visionary detail of Sozomen, as was right, and says that Constantine walked about his city with a spear in his hand to mark its sweep. Certain who were with him thought that he was making its space too great, but the emperor replied that he must go on until he who led him stopped. Thus he showed that a certain Heavenly Dynamis was leading him' (1927: 127- my emphasis)⁵⁶.

⁵³ The role of the cross-in-circle motif in relation to the establishment of a *termon* was described in Chapter Two.

⁵⁴ Furthermore, the similarity of Constantine's vision with Oswald's erection of a wooden cross should be recalled here. This establishes a tradition of emulating or using primary Christian moments in insular settings.

⁵⁵ It should be recalled that the Roman practice of establishing boundaries is very similar in turn to Constantine's founding of Constantinople – described below.

⁵⁶ Philostorgius (trans. Walford 1850: 438), from his *Ecclesiastical History of the Church*, Chapter Nine, reports: He says that, in the twenty-eighth year of his reign, Constantine turned Byzantium into the city of Constantinople; and that, when he went to mark out the circuit of the city, he walked round it with a spear in his hand; and that his attendants thought that he was measuring out too large a space, one of them came up to him as asked him, "How far, O prince?" and that the emperor answered, "Until he who goes before me comes to a stop;" by this

Rykwert has also discussed the founding of Constantinople, questioning who the guide was: “I shall go on until he who is walking ahead of me stops”. Who did Constantine claim to see ahead of him - Christ or an Angel? His genius? Or the *Tyche* of the new city...’ (1976: 202).

It is informative that if we look at some Constantinian coins of the time (Fig. 205) we see that they might represent such a figure. It is also significant that the ‘victory’ is shown with a *Labarum*⁵⁷ (*chi-rho* standard) and a cross and globe in the other hand⁵⁸. What this does illustrate is the strong influence of eastern tradition and practice on the early Irish church. It also connects the use of the ringed cross symbol (*chi-rho*) in the demarcation of spatial boundaries, which was discussed in Chapter Two.

A significant point is that St Patrick also has a supernatural guide on his journeys. It is possible that the author or Patrick himself knew of this tradition of founding the first holy city of the Roman Empire and that this tradition was emulated in the retelling of this scene⁵⁹. A possible illustration of this passage can be found on the St Tola’s Cross, Dysert O’Dea. On the west side we find a scene depicting two central figures, with what MacNamara (1899: 248-249) defined as ‘angels’ with wings holding a central staff (Figs 206, 207). This might be explained as an attempt to illustrate a more spiritual delineation and raises the possibility that other biblical iconography was used to illustrate spiritual delineation in the secular world. The use of iconography for messages such as these could be expanded by looking at Adam and Eve, who frequently grasp a central tree or are in the act of passing the apple (see Figs 208, 209, head of 210). The Adam and Eve scene is the second most frequent iconographic theme on the Irish High Crosses. It is found mainly on the east or west faces of crosses, predominantly on the shaft, and has a broad distribution across Ireland (Data 151). The Garden of Eden was the first act of demarcation for the human race, for by grasping the tree Adam and Eve set the first boundary in place between paradise and humanity - paradise and sin. The similarity in gestures might explain the popularity of the theme on the Irish High Crosses as well as supporting the view (Doherty 1985: 65; Edwards 1990: 18; Aitchison 1994: 275-278) that demarcation scenes were depicted on High Crosses. It should be recalled that if Richardson (1994) is correct and the capped Irish High Crosses were representations of the Holy Sepulchre, then Irish

answer clearly manifesting that some heavenly power was leading him on, and teaching him what he ought to do’.

⁵⁷ The *Labarum* is another variation of the Constantinian *chi-rho* symbol that is seen as a possible model for the High Cross ringed form. This was Constantine’s symbol of his armies derived from his vision. Sozomen (trans. Walford 1850: 15), from his *Ecclesiastical History of the Church*, reports that the *Labarum* became the symbols for the legions and was carried as a ‘warlike trophy’.

⁵⁸ The implications of this cross symbolism will be discussed in more detail below.

⁵⁹ This is similar to the recasting of eastern saints’ lives and biblical tales to apply to Irish saints, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Alternatively, more broadly as suggested by Eliade (1958, 1959), that in creating an *axis mundi* we are mimicking the act of the gods in creating the cosmos.

High Crosses (with capstones) represented not only the burial place of Christ but also the mythic burial place of Adam⁶⁰. The secular delineation may have also signified a spiritual delineation, expressed through the Adam and Eve scenes.

Furthermore, it is possible to interpret the popularity of some of the Daniel scenes (Data 152) in this manner as well. Daniel, like Isaac, is identified in the Old Testament as a prefiguration of Christ. Scenes of Daniel and Lions can be interpreted as Daniel (civilisation / Christian) holding back the Lions (wild / pagans). This would fit in with the early Christian period where the monastic movement drove Christian communities to segregate themselves from non-Christians. Looking at both Adam and Eve and the Daniel scenes does provide us with examples of religious iconography that has a clear secular message. Another such example has been offered by Ó Carragáin (1989: 42), who in a study of St Paul and St Anthony depictions on the Irish High Crosses (Fig. 211), suggests that the scene of their breaking bread had special significance when discussed by Adomnán: 'It is clear that for Adomnán the liturgical rite of *co-fractio* symbolised monastic harmony, based on courteous humility; it is also clear that the liturgical rite existed in his mind as a symbol that could be used imaginatively for literary purposes'. Ó Carragáin also suggests that the loaves at the base of the Moone Cross (Fig. 98) are reminders of this Eucharistic scene. It is interesting that the saints are sometimes depicted seated at a table and the table is sometimes in the shape of a *Tau Cross* (also known as a *crux commissa* or St Anthony Cross), e.g. the west shaft cross-shaft from Kilnaruane, Co.Cork. Perhaps this scene functioned as a suggested model for social behaviour in the context of disagreements such as land or other secular disputes.

CROSSES AND INTERNAL BOUNDARIES

It has been suggested that not only did the Irish High Crosses have a role at the border of the monastic enclosures but that as early as the seventh century they conformed to 'definite rules within the enclosure' (Herity 1983: 256). This goes against earlier assumptions made by Henry (1965: 91) that within the monastery enclosure 'all sorts of buildings were scattered, probably without much order'. Aitchison (1994: 237) has suggested that the main reason for the establishment of boundaries was to demarcate the sacred from the profane. He sees the effect of this demarcation as a very tangible force, 'the divine sanctification of space found the cognitive reality of the area enclosed in

⁶⁰ Christ was also believed to have been crucified on a branch from the Tree of Knowledge, which Adam and Eve grip or alternatively are orientated around.

relation, or rather, in opposition to the profane space which lies beyond the boundary' (1994: 272). The highly visible Irish High Cross would have been easily recognised as marking sacred grounds⁶¹.

Aitchison (1994: 236) sees the formalised positioning of High Crosses within ecclesiastical sites as a historical development of the marking of boundaries with simpler crosses and cross-slabs. However, this is a questionable assumption considering the parallel development of Irish High Crosses with cross-slabs at most of the major sites. There is no evidence that High Crosses replaced other freestanding crosses in this capacity. There is an absence of Irish High Crosses at contemporary smaller monastic sites where cross-slabs fulfil this role: at the hermitage on Ardoileán, Co. Galway, for example, there is a slab at the entry of the enclosure that leads to the oratory rather than a developed freestanding cross. The more spartan standing stones found at hermitages indicates that these could function adequately in this role. This once again suggests that while it was necessary to separate sacred from profane, the Irish High Crosses may be more a reflection of the concentration of skills and patronage at the larger monasteries than a representation of a different functional role. Furthermore, within the communication matrix the Irish High Cross contributed one voice to a larger cultural orientation system. The Irish High Crosses almost certainly fulfilled more than one role; but they appear more likely to represent the evolution of both the medium and the message in larger settlements, than to function simply as a replacement of simpler crosses.

The intended purpose of the Irish High Cross was therefore more complex than merely a way of delimiting church ground from secular. The effect of this boundary was often to advertise the remains (presence) of a saint⁶². To some extent, monastic settlements were organised around the display of saints' bones and their remains (Bitel 1990: 57). At the dedication of a church, *brandeae* (relics or remains of saints) were placed in an altar capped with a slab (Werner 1990: 208-209)⁶³. It was from the control of access to these remains that local monasteries gained their power and authority – the crosses functioned as sentinels. Standing stones appear to have had a defensive and overt role, acting not only as a wall or as an invisible line between crosses, but as guardians to the entrance to the restricted area. Irish High Crosses were not just symbolic but emitted a power that had a real effect on the people of the time. They mediated social and cultural relations internally and externally of the settlement boundaries. They had an implied sentience, being able to distinguish

⁶¹ Armstrong (1993: 14) points out that 'Once a place was marked as sacred by some special religious phenomenon, it was almost never desacralised...'

⁶² The relationship of standing stones with Founders' Tombs was discussed in more detail in the preceding chapter.

⁶³ This was probably in imitation of Christ's burial at Golgotha and demonstrates the versatility of stone slabs.

between friend and foe, Christian or non-Christian⁶⁴. Adomnán (trans. Anderson and Anderson 1961: 306-307) records that a cross protected the path to the southern chapel to *druim Moccu Blai* and in another account Saint Mochutu imprisons a demon in a standing stone and it was used as a boundary marker for his monastery⁶⁵.

Freestanding crosses of all description were used in conjunction with and in place of walls to mark the boundary between the sacred areas and secular. Sacred areas were raised, where possible, to a higher level than the rest of the settlement. Within the monastic settlement enclosure, the church was surrounded by an open area in the centre of a *platea*. This was where gifts and offerings were delivered (Macdonald 1984: 293-294). The placement of High Crosses in this area would have served to heighten this effect (Herity 1983: 127-248)⁶⁶. Bitel (1990: 76, Fig. 12) cites the example of the enclosure of Clonmacnois: 'the *platea* was... a site of carefully controlled, ceremonial contact between the saint and lay people'. The oratory and its annexes (slab, tomb, etc) is generally located on a raised terrace (Henry 1957: 154)⁶⁷; wherever this area is not raised it is at least separated from the rest of the enclosure by a wall or a fence of slabs. It should also be noted that monasteries are often found in elevated areas, though there would have been defensive advantages to this as well. The raised section might have a background in a simple Judeo-Christian association of heights with heaven, and areas closer to earth with the secular sphere (Eliade 1959: 36-49). We find this also on the High Crosses when comparing the decoration of the ringed-head to that of the base. Secular hunting scenes are frequently found on the bases, while iconography relating to events of Christ's life is found closer to the top of the cross (compare Data 145 and Data 180). This conforms to the symbolism associated with other representations of the *axis mundi* such as trees and pillars as has been discussed

⁶⁴ It should be recalled from Chapter 2, footnote 30, that millstones are imbued with a similar ability to distinguish Christian from non-Christian, in the context of whose grain they would mill. The concept of sentient artefacts can also be found in other areas such as weapons. In Cormac's *Three Irish Glossaries* there is a passage where the swords are described as speaking out if false victories are claimed: '...for their swords used to turn against them when they made a false trophy. Reasonable (was) this; for demons used to speak to them from their arms, so that hence their arms were safeguards' (trans. Stokes 1872: 261).

⁶⁵ A stone was set as a sentry by St. Mochutu, in *Martyrology of Oengus* (trans. Stokes 1905: 95), 'And get thee, O Satan, into the pillar-stone to the south of the cell, and thou shouldst cause no hurt there save to one who shall resist the Church'. Plummer (1910: clvii) details other examples from the *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* of spirits being imprisoned in stones or stones being used for protection. Perhaps related to this is an observation by Henry (1957: 152), who notes that on the Church Island Oratory at the top of the front wall there is a stone terminal that must have held a socketed stone. She believes another example of this can be found at the oratory of Templemonaghan, Dingle peninsula. The stones are very worn but they appear to be animal heads similar to metal work of the eighth century. It would not be unreasonable to assume that these animal heads were placed for apotropaic reasons as well as warding off unwelcome (uninvited or uninitiated) visitors.

⁶⁶ Herity (1984: 108-110) believes that the placing of crosses such as the Cross of the Scriptures (c. 900 AD) in a prominent public location was a significant move by the church.

⁶⁷ Abbot's house are found in a raised locations compared to the rest of the site (Doherty 1985: 52).

This discussion raises four questions on the internal orientation of Christian settlements:

- Who was trying to reach the upper areas of a monastery?
- Who was being excluded?
- Why was entrance desirable?
- And, what was the 'key' to get into the upper areas?

To answer these in reverse order; the key would have been to be a recognised Christian, proven by baptism - the ritual used to transform a non-Christian into a neophyte, then to practising and recognised Christian. Baptism has a special significance in the life of Christ because it is the first time that he reveals his divine nature. Insight into the importance of baptism to the early Church might be illustrated from the importance early priests placed on competition with druids for wells (Bitel 1990: 45)⁶⁸.

By AD 700, most monastic settlements had established themselves and had wells within their enclosures, which presumably were used for baptism (Bitel 1990: 74). At the less developed monastic settlements it appears that standing stones, mainly slabs, were put in place to mark the well as Christian, e.g. at the Rathlin, O'Birne monastery (c.500) three slabs are placed near the holy well within the outer enclosure (Herity 1995: 90-92). The impetus for this practice might come from the belief, recorded by Adomnán in *De Locis Sanctis*, that there was a large wooden cross erected at the place where Christ was baptised⁶⁹.

Where wells are not found there are sometimes *bullawn* stones, which may have held holy water for use in baptism (Bitel 1990: 51). Waterman (1976: 38) has identified *bullawn* stones as a common feature in early monasteries, e.g. at the Banagher church, Co. Derry. Another possible use for these wells has been suggested by Herity (1990: 97), who believes that the dwellings at Ardoileán, Co. Galway were located near water so monks could mortify themselves. This would have been achieved by immersing themselves in cold water. The standing stones near these areas could have acted as witnesses (for Christ) and as models (reminders) of Christ's suffering.

⁶⁸ The non-Christian belief system saw wells as another locus that marked an entrance between this world and the otherworld. As discussed above, rivers and wells were perceived as dispensers of sacred wisdom and poetry to men (Watson 1981: 167). This sacred wisdom was a vital component of the sovereign's rights and ability to rule the land. It was also the source of the powers of the *fili* or poets, who as druids were in direct competition with priests. Controlling the source of their powers effectively took away their power.

⁶⁹ 'The sacred and honoured spot in which the Lord was baptised by John is always covered by the waters of the river Jordan; and, as Arculf relates, who reached the actual spot and swam to and fro across the stream, in this sacred spot a tall wooden cross is implanted' (trans. Meehan 1958: 87).

The veneration of wells is a widespread and ancient tradition in Ireland. There are sixty holy wells on the Dingle peninsula and pilgrimages were made to most of these. 'Most are dedicated to saints of the early Irish church. The remainder are named either after the principal cure for which they were famed or they are named *Tobar na Croise*, after an adjacent cross-inscribed stone' (Cuppige 1986: 352-357). The healing powers are varied, e.g. *Tobar Ghobnait*, No. 911 Ballinagroun, had the power to cure sore eyes and *Tobar an Ghiolla Dhuibh*, No. 919 Ballyeightragh, cured stomach ailments. Of the sixty wells in the Dingle Peninsula, seventeen had surviving slabs with crosses; some of these sites have been disturbed so there might have been more crosses associated with wells. Apart from the Dingle Peninsula, there are thirty-five holy wells listed in the Iveragh Peninsula survey (O'Sullivan and Sheehan 1996: 336-342).

CROSSES AS MARKERS: PILGRIMAGE, GRAVES, HEREDITARY LAND

Entrance to a monastery would have been desirable to two groups of Christians: those in the local area who sought to participate in a service, and pilgrims. The word pilgrimage is derived from the Latin *peregrinatio* - which means to go abroad. The general criterion for pilgrimage is to interrupt one's normal life activities for the purpose of visiting a religious *locus sanctus*, whether close or far away. As discussed earlier, pilgrimage as a practice came to Ireland following its popularity in the east between the fourth and seventh centuries. The movement resulted in Christians undertaking pilgrimages to the places of Christ's and the saints' lives. The reasons for these journeys were varied, as Vikan (1998: 231) summarises: the sick sought healing; the penitent, forgiveness; the troubled, guidance, and all felt the desire to affirm and strengthen their faith. Vikan also states that as the traditions of pilgrimage evolved over time there was a change of the focus of the pilgrimage from historical sites to sacramental ones:

[it is] in this period of the emerging *locus sanctus* that relics and then holy men became central figures of Christian piety. In each - holy place, holy thing, and holy person - the power of the sacred had become objectified.... Ultimately, each pious traveller was (and is) driven by the same basic conviction; namely, that the objectified holy that he or she will encounter at the journey's end is in some measure transferable through physical contact, as if it were a charge of sacred electricity...As early Christians came to accept the notion that the holy was susceptible to concentration in places, things, and people, they inevitably came to accept the corollary notion that the power of the localised holy was susceptible to transfer through contagion (Vikan 1998: 231,234).

The effect of pilgrimage on monastic settlements is also evident in other areas. We know that standing stones were an integral part of the *locus sanctus* symbolic vocabulary. Their exact role is unclear, but their locations at entranceways would suggest that they symbolised the entrance to the *locus sanctus*, marked a route or guarded the area. It is also possible that the Irish High Cross or standing stones of any description were the destination of pilgrimages, as discussed above. One of the possible explanations of the capstones covered in this study is that they were reliquaries or representations of shrines. This might explain their role as a focus of pilgrimage, as a shrine of a founder.

Regardless of their intended functions, it is likely that High Crosses would function as a spiritual marker from afar, indicating the Christian nature of a location. It has also been suggested that standing stones might serve as processional stations in a formalised pilgrimage route (Edwards 1990: 164). In discussing the layout of the hermitage on Ardoileán, Co. Galway, Herity (1990: 84) suggests that there was a slab at the landing place of the island to mark the start of the pilgrimage stations. There is other physical evidence linking crosses and pilgrimage routes. A late eighth or ninth century standing stone from Ballavarkish, Isle of Man, has scratched markings on it. This might have been part of a wider practice of pilgrims wanting to leave a mark of their visit to a sacred site (Thomas 1971: 190); part of the ritual involved with the route. Certain common motifs on different crosses might be evidence of missionary activity between Britain and Ireland during this period (Ó hÉailidhe 1957: 87). However, the movement of artists, rather than a shared pilgrims' route, might also explain this.

Ultimately, the focus, perhaps justification, of any monastery was its saints' remains and/or relics. It was by the control of the supply and demand to these that the monastery was able to maintain and promote its influence to the early Irish community; additionally, its comparative relevance and status to other churches. It should be recalled that early churches were in competition for resources from nobles. The more significant the relics (appeared) the greater the ability to attract devotions and endowments.

The establishment of monasteries in Ireland made a subtle change in the way that social communities were oriented at the time. Since the monasteries would to some extent have taken over the role of the pre-Christian *locus sanctus* this would have also changed the relationship between individuals and their ties to their kin and the land. The church was now the focus of a community instead of the graves of ancestors. The focus would be moved from the land and one's ancestors to the monastery and to the common ancestor for Christians, Christ, and through him and the significance of his

shared burial place, to Adam – the father of all people. Standing stones played a key role in the dissemination of this theme. Even though Irish High Crosses have not been directly associated with Irish graves they were symbolic of Christ's grave.

This transfer in associations to the church can be illustrated by briefly looking at the use of *ogam* on standing stones to mark graves. It is likely that, within the insular region, burials near or on boundaries were used in pre-Christian times to mark the continuity of demarcated areas. Charles-Edwards (1976: 83) suggests that the 'use of burial sites [in late pagan Ireland] as boundary markers ...suggests a developed rationale for such use'. The main reasoning he suggests was legal in nature. In the late sixth and early seventh centuries, a person could claim a particular piece of land by hereditary right. The boundary would have been marked by a *fert* or grave mound. *Fert* has been identified as meaning, 'heir of a gravestone which lies about lands' (Watkins 1963: 32). Tirechán, who was writing in the late seventh century, identifies *ferta* as a 'heathen' term; the Christian word was seen as *relic* (trans. de Paor 1993: 104). Charles-Edwards believes that:

The two pieces of evidence appear to refer to the same custom: men may be buried upon the boundary of their land; their grave may be marked by *ogam* inscriptions upon stones; and the inscriptions may be used by heirs to confirm their hereditary right to the land. These inscriptions normally specify the father or kindred of the dead man, and thus facilitate the argument of their heirs based upon proving the identity of the former holders of the lands...The inscriptions over the graves have the same role in showing title to land as charters or other deed in a more literate age; but they appeal to divine power, it is not the power of the Christian God and fear of His judgment, but rather the power of a pagan divinity. Furthermore, the inscription only supports one type of title to ownership, that of hereditary right (1976: 84-85).

This line of thought was also suggested by Binchy (1971: 160), who states: 'in a contest (*comlonn*) about the ownership of land these stones are "fighters" to establish the title of him on whose boundary they stand'. In this legal context, 'it (the *ogam*) is equivalent to a witness' (Plummer 1928: 388)⁷⁰. However, we should bear in mind that it is the combination of four factors that empower the

⁷⁰ Related to this is the account by *Giraldus Cambrensis* in which he describes a Dublin cross as speaking: 'It had happened that a certain citizen had invoked it, and it alone, as the witness and surety of a certain contract. As time went on the other contracting party denied the agreement and completely and steadfastly refused to return the money which the other had given him according to the terms of the contract. The citizens, more in irony than for any serious reason, declared that they should go in a body to the aforesaid church and hear what the cross would say. The cross being adjured and called to witness, gave testimony to the truth' (O'Meara 1982: 85-86, section 73). While this is a later account, it does highlight the role of a standing stone as witness and a role in legal proceedings. In this case, the carving of a crucified Christ talks. On the *ogam* stones there is the same implied sentence. This might have been how literacy appeared to a largely illiterate population that was amazed by recorded events. Another account (unsourced), is documented by Wood-Martin (1895: 206), where

ogam stones in this respect: the pillar, the *ogam* inscription, their location on a boundary and an appropriate audience and its frame of reference. Changing any one of these factors might change the meaning associated with the pillar.

We find similar examples in the Bible of stone pillars as memorials to the dead (Ge 28:18-22; Ge 31:45-52; Jos 4:2-9; Jos 24:25; 1Sa 7:12). Rocks were also used generally to mark the burials of the dead (Ge 35:20), Calvary for the sepulchre of Christ (Mt 27:16; Mr 15:46; Mr 16:3) being the most famous sealing rock. There are also examples of inscribed pillars offering a sense of immortality (2Sa 18:18). The Bible records the use of stone pillars as witnesses of vows (Ge 28:18; Ge 31:13) and of covenants (Ge 34:52) and some were erected to commemorate events (Ex 24:4)⁷¹.

In early medieval times, the dead were viewed differently from today. The intimate connection between the individual and his dead kin was active - to use a modern term, viewed as 'real-time'. The *ogam* stones enabled the dead to protect the land for their descendents. The seventh-century Tírechán *Life of Patrick* tells of a king of Connacht, *Eógan Bel*, who left instructions that he be buried with his face towards the enemies of Connacht in the north - this would keep them powerless (trans. Mulchrone 1939: 11.65-70; cf.11.82-7)⁷².

Practices of the early church make it clear that it saw certain areas of 'pagan' thought as threats to its success. Bitel (1990: 43) believes that monasteries were deliberately located on non-Christian spiritual areas: 'the monks raised Christianised monuments where ancestors had worshipped, died, or been buried; they allowed pagan monuments to guard the sites of churches and saints' shrines'. Doherty (1984: 95; 1985: 52) shares this view, suggesting that 'some smaller churches were probably Christianised pagan centres'. It is also likely that monks actively reinterpreted non-Christian

two standing stones, from Farranglogh, Co. Meath, are called 'speaking stones' and these stones were asked questions for judgement.

⁷¹ Elaide (1958: 232-233) in discussing the role of *Lia Fail* stone with Irish royalty, within the context of representing the centre, indicates that the stone gets its value from bearing witness. He differentiates the importance of the stones as *hierophanies* - manifestations of the sacred- rather than being adored as stones (Eliade 1959:11-12). However, this was not always the case, while from a Christian source, from the *Martyrology of Oengus* (trans. Stokes 1905: 187) there is an account of a stone being worshiped that was adorned with gold. 'a stone (*cloch*) round which was gold (*ór*), which the heathen had and worshipt. And out of it was a devil that used to speak: *Cermand Cestach* was his name, and it was the chief idol of the north'. Although, this passage might represent a Christian misunderstanding of the reverence of an *axis mundi*, and dedications to past kin, rather than the worship of a stone. This interpretation might be driven by differentiations between the Christian use of stones that are also recorded above and passages banned their construction: Le:26:1 'Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land'.

⁷² This is similar account in the burial of Loeguire son Níall detailed in the *Renees Dindsenchas* where the Fort of is described as: 'Loeguire's body with his shield and spear, was set in the outer south-easterly rampart of Loeguire's royal fort at Tara, with his face to the south, fighting against Leinster...' (trans. Stokes 1894a: 284).

monuments and modified them so that they were acceptable to church standards, following the example set by the saints (Bitel 1990: 51). This might have been accomplished by ritual or by marking the monument with the most indelible symbol in their arsenal - the cross. As has been discussed above the collective memory of the people about these monuments and places was also altered by the rewriting of local myths and history (Bitel 1990: 53; Geary 1994: 32-33; Sjoestedt 1940: 6-8). Language was altered with the meaning of words reinterpreted to Christian standards. For example, the word *érlam*, meaning patron saint, originally signified a tutelary deity or god of the tribe; *cretaír* means relic or blessed object, while in the pagan context it meant that which has magic power in it, a talisman or fetish (Doherty 1984: 95).

However, not every non-Christian site of religious meaning was incorporated into the new Irish Church. The boundary of early medieval Armagh deliberately excluded a pagan stone circle (Aitchison 1994: 222). Additionally, the boundary shown in the colophon drawing also has a double wall, which Nees (1983: 68) suggests might be intended to indicate that the monastery was built over a pagan site (see Fig. 199). This could be a statement of Christian purity for this ecclesiastical area or it could be an example of two belief systems operating at the same time as each other, catering for different (or shared) audiences.

As well as marking graves, *ogam* stones are thought to have been used to signify the hereditary ownership of land: 'an *ogam* inscription could be used by a person as evidence of lawful title to land of which he was already in possession or to which he was laying claim in a hereditary right' (McManus 1991: 164). McManus has suggested that the *ogam* stones could have had a dual function in this respect, as both memorials and land charters (1991: 165)⁷³. Charles-Edwards (1976: 85) interprets the role of these *ogam* inscriptions as recording the names of ancestors to reinforce the power of the dead men to repel non-kinsmen from claiming the land, though McManus (1991: 165-166) has cautioned that there is no evidence that they believed the dead would actively defend the land. The case for considering *ogam* as a non-Christian funerary practice will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven, from a communication content perspective.

Hamlin (1982b: 283-285) has shown from Macalister's (1945) survey of *ogam* stones in Ireland that 110 of the 320 are found in ecclesiastical contexts: 44 of these were carved with crosses, which could mean that they were moved into a Christian context. If the use of standing stones was strongly

⁷³ Hamlin (1972: 24) has also identified the role of *ogam* as commemorating boundaries and events. However, Stevenson (1989:147) cautions that '*ogam* stones' and 'pillar stones' are identified as different artefacts in prehistoric lists of inventions attributed to the kings of Munster concluding 'boundary stones and *ogam* stones were not always the same thing'.

associated with pagan burials at this time, this does raise several questions. The first is the status of blank standing stones, of which there are some at monastic settlements, inscribed with neither crosses nor *ogam*. Does the use of standing stones as legal boundary markers explain the large number of cross bases that survive without shafts? If the evidence of land ownership was in the *ferta* and the standing stones it is possible these could have been destroyed during clan battles or disputes. The third question is whether the early Irish church, by moving the burial of kin, effectively took over the management of land law, to strengthen further its position in the community⁷⁴.

OTHER KNOWN USES OF CROSSES

As discussed, standing stones appear also to have been used as markers for roads. The roads sometimes 'continued from parish to parish, forming long-distance routes, in some instances skirting high moorland areas' (Langdon 1995: 182). Stones could be used to mark not only the route but also sacred places along the way (Bitel 1990: 64-65). Some crosses are referred to as roadside-crosses, such as the Aberlemno cross, and might have functioned as spiritual halfway houses. This is perhaps demonstrated by accounts of Patrick's practices. An account by Muirchú, writing in the seventh century, tells of Patrick stopping from his chariot to pray whenever he saw a cross (trans. Bieler 1979: 114-115).

Some of the blank stones were clearly used in specific contexts. Some blank standing stones, at St Berriherth's Kyle, Templeneity, Co. Tipperary, may 'mark burial-places of unbaptised infants' (Ó h-Éailidhe 1967: 103); and infant burial sites are similarly marked at Knockea, Co. Limerick (O'Kelly 1967: 76-77) and Reask, Co. Kerry (Fanning 1981: 138)⁷⁵. However, there is a possibility that these graves were marked with cross-inscribed slabs (Fanning 1981: 142), like the inscribed cross in the south-west corner of a children's burial ground in Feenune (Corlett 1993: 169). It is unlikely that all of the uninscribed slabs represent graves of the unbaptised.

There is a curious feature of the standing stones at St Berriherth's Kyle, Templeneity, Co. Tipperary, a series of standing stones that are thought to be part of a pilgrimage route taking the role of stations. The first and last of these stones are the only two not inscribed with a cross (O h-Éailidhe 1967: 103).

⁷⁴ As discussed earlier, one reason for this might have been an attempt by the church not to be seen (misinterpreted) as using *ogam* to an illiterate population that might not be able to tell the difference between *ogam* and Latin characters. The impact of this will be discussed in more detail in the communication chapter. However, there is not evidence of the widespread use of written evidence of title to land in early Irish legal practice (Sharpe 1986: 164); alternative explanations for this control will be discussed below.

⁷⁵ Fanning sees some Reask burials as part of a *ceallínach* (children's burial ground).

These stones are in a clearly ecclesiastical context but only their physical proximity to the other stations marks their purpose. They are almost like spiritual 'warm up and warm down' stations where the pilgrim could enter and leave the frame of mind required.

Regardless of what meanings might be extrapolated from the location of the crosses, we have very little primary evidence, aside from the *Book of Mulling* diagram, as to their purpose and use. The presence of *ogam* on standing stones shows that we cannot assume that all of the standing stones within a Christian context are Christian in intent. The larger unknown is where to place the blank standing stones that might be either Christian or non-Christian.

We find the placement of the more developed High Crosses was not exclusively within settlements, but also in the surrounding areas. Hamlin (1982a: 69) has provided a definition of the role of High Crosses that has been endorsed by Harbison (1992: 352), that they 'marked memorable events, commemorated individuals, delimited boundaries, areas of sanctuary or particular parts of monasteries, recorded land grants, and served as a focus for preaching, prayer, penance and sealing agreements. All these purposes (and others) could have been, and doubtless were, served by wooden or plain stone crosses, but the figure-carved crosses must also have conveyed certain messages to the viewer⁷⁶.

Some of these roles need to be explored in order to expand on the context of the crosses as communicators, which will be investigated in more detail in the following chapter. The use of a High Cross as location for public penance or enforcement of capital laws testifies to the High Cross's role in public life – as opposed to private artefacts such as jewellery that would have had a more limited audience. The use of a cross as a sign of political or religious asylum can be demonstrated from an inscription on a pillar at Kilnasaggart, South Co. Armagh, situated on the main road that connects Tara with Emain, which states: 'this place has been given by Ternoc, son of Ciarán-the-little, under the protection of Peter the Apostle' (Henry 1965: 119, PL 49). In terms of the enforcement of

⁷⁶ It is informative to contrast this to the associations with stones from the *Vitae Sanctorum Hibernae* by Plummer (1910: clvii): 'Various stones are regarded as sacred because of their association with certain saints,...as a site of a martyrdom; often it served as a vessel to transport a stain across the ocean when other means of navigation failed; even more frequently it shows the print of his feet or kneew, or the traces of punishment of his enemies....other stones held sacred because of their connection with a saint's birth, or baptism...These sacred stones have various marvellous properties; they heal diseases, either directly, or by the water that collects in their hollows, or in which they have been washed. Stones set up by Saints cannot be moved; and there are stones which if removed always return to their place. Going 'deisel' or righthandwise round certain stones ensures victory; to turn them thrice ensures a safe return. We have noted elsewhere stones that detect perjurers; but they test other crimes also, and give oracles and grant petitions; they produce rain, and cause a favourable wind'.

capital law there is the account of the 'Cross of Executions': 'Mac Gilla-Eidich, who stole valuables from the church of Derry, was hanged, according to the *Annals of Ulster* in 1197, at the 'Cross of Executions', (*Crois na Riag*), in the town' (trans. Hennessy and MacCarthy 1893, vol II, 226-7). There is also an English example from an extract from Joceline's *Life of St Kentigern*, concerning a cross erected near Glasgow: '...the cross was very large, and never from that time lacked great virtue, seeing that many maniacs and those vexed with unclean spirits are used to be tied of a Sunday night to that cross, and in the morning they are found restored, freed, and cleansed, though oftimes they are found dead or at the point of death' (trans. Bryce 1989: 26-27)⁷⁷. It is clear that there was an established practice of using crosses as centres for public laws and customs. Hamlin (1987b) provides more examples of the use of crosses in a detailed summary of literary sources⁷⁸. Notably, many of these literary accounts do not clearly distinguish between High Crosses and cross-slabs. Significantly, they also do not always refer directly to the crosses themselves but they are mentioned as spatial orientations within a narrative of text.

It is likely that the more developed High Crosses had a more specific audience than cross-slabs. Inscriptions can provide us with some idea of the audience, patrons and purpose of the crosses. While Irish inscriptions were, with one exception, not in Latin, English inscriptions show a clear change in language depending on their associated depictions. Records of patronage (secular inscriptions) are recorded in the vernacular; whereas inscriptions that relate to religious depictions are recorded in Latin (Higgitt 1986: 144-145). This would indicate that English crosses, or their decoration, were capable of having different purposes or even possibly that one cross had two different audiences. This also raises the possibility that Irish crosses were intended for an ecclesiastical audience. The limited use of writing on the crosses confirms the likely connection between the High Crosses and the hierarchy of society. The Cross of Scriptures at Clonmacnois and the Cross of Durrow have both been linked to the names of nobles in the surrounding regions. High Crosses at Durrow, Clonmacnois and Kinnity appear to be linked to the Southern *Uí Néill* dynasty kings (Ó Floinn 1994: 923; de Paor 1987; Harbison 1999)⁷⁹. These families are thought to have had close ties with these monasteries. This indicates that the larger, more ornate, monumental crosses were the products of wealthy patrons, which allows us to interpret them as symbols of wealth on the Irish landscape.

⁷⁷ Bryce (1989: 26-27) cites a market cross at Old Rayne, Aberdeenshire that had an attachment for a chain; he does not provide a date for this cross.

⁷⁸ An example of a cross as a marker is at Iona, where a large cross base (Reilig Odhráin, no. 103) is placed close to the possible entrance of the *vallum* (RCAHMS 1982: 17; Fisher 1994: 41). From the *Annals of Ulster*, Year 1166, there is the reference to 'Cross of the door of the Close' (trans. Hennessy and MacCarthy 1893: 153).

⁷⁹ Pictish standing stones have also been linked to the patronage of royalty (Driscoll 1988:179).

In comparison, English crosses are believed to mark the graves of the lord and his kin (McGuire and Clark 1987: 44-45), Irish examples were not inscribed for the dead but for living individuals. The production of a High Cross or even a series of slabs would have been a considerable expense for the patron of the cross. This would economically limit their production to the patronage of the local lords or local monasteries⁸⁰. If this is apparent today, the effect must have been even more pronounced when they were erected. To a community that was not exposed to the grandeur of the Roman occupation the stone High Crosses must have been a dominating feature: symbolising change and a clear declaration of the presence of Christianity.

The High Crosses appear as a tradition separate from that of the decorated upright cross-slabs and appear to have been erected with a different purpose from their funerary ancestors. The change is marked by the development of decorations that indicate that each cross was meant to be freestanding and viewed from all sides. By contrast, the vast majority of slabs are decorated only on one face, and in the majority of cases this appears to have been in the form of an inscribed token rather than plastic ornament.

Finally, some stone crosses have a clearly defined purpose such as the 'sundial type' (Figs 160, 161)⁸¹. Harbison (1991: 214-215) agrees with Hamlin that the sundials might have been used to coordinate monastic offices and recitations, and suggests that they might have had a function in pilgrimage rounds, which shall be discussed in more detail below. The early Irish sundials tend to be freestanding pillars while Anglo-Saxon versions are found built into walls. This would indicate that the Irish examples would be more open to the kinds of symbolic characteristics associated with pillars, discussed above. They would also be viewable from all sides. This might mean that some Irish High Crosses might have had a role in marking the passing of time.

⁸⁰ The production of any art or specialised material at this time has been identified as an index of wealth, and of cultural and technological ability (Ryan 1991: 118).

⁸¹ For example, there is a sundial ringed cross from *Manistir Chiaráin*, Inishmore, Aran Islands (Higgins 1987: 66, No. 85). Hamlin (1987a: 29-32) has identified four Irish sundials at: Bangor, Co. Down; Clogher, Co. Tyrone; Nendrum, Co. Down; and Saul, Co. Down. There is another at Kilmalkedar, Co. Kerry (Cuppige 1986 Fig 183, No. 2).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has investigated the role of the cross as a medium through an exploration of the different contexts in which they are found. This has involved an examination of them from both Christian and non-Christian perspectives of their location; as well as comparatively, from a functional perspective, against the wider use of standing stones. Freestanding crosses have been discussed in terms of their development and use, with a view to trying to isolate any specific factors that might have driven the evolution of cross morphologies into forms that are more complex.

The introduction of the cross form onto the Irish landscape was a competitive development. There were already specific associations inherent to the non-Christian belief system, linked closely to natural formations and constructed monuments. What the Christian and non-Christian 'actors' on the Irish stage have in common is their role as orientation markers – functioning as artefacts that helped to define and orientate humanity's position within the cosmos. Several primary dimensions were associated with the standing stone as *locus*: the organisation of settlements, internally and externally, on the landscape; their location within the cosmos; and as dimensional doorways between the living and the afterlife. The primary identification of this *locus* was the *axis mundi*. As the preceding discussion in this thesis on symbolism has indicated, this was also a significant and complementary element of Christian belief and the non-Christian belief system.

However, before the introduction of Christianity there is little evidence for a similarly developed material support for the *axis mundi* symbolism. Natural artefacts such as trees or stones appear to have been utilised instead. While Christianity can be demonstrated to have trees as a central part of its symbolism, there was a preference for more symbolic and less naturalistic material forms, such as pillars and crosses. It is likely that the early Christian church – described as an urban religion – avoided naturalistic symbolism to differentiate itself from non-Christian beliefs. While the expression of *axis mundi* was different in the two belief systems, the core symbolism, of the cosmos being orientated around a central locale, was common to both.

A key change at this time occurs with the preliminary and gradual shift of Irish society into urban nodes, described in the preceding chapter, in terms of associations with the *axis mundi*. The Irish trees and graves were perceived as doorways between this world and kin in the otherworld. In pre-Christian times, communities were organised around gravesites. This changed in Christian times with the church taking over the central place of a community. The cross, as discussed in the last chapter, was often at the centre of this new development as a symbol of orientation. This appears to have

been a calculated move by the early Church to layer Christian symbolism and meanings over the non-Christian associations, resulting in a paradigm shift of perceptions and social associations of community and kin, to the view that they were all part of the Christian family. The church at the centre of community still fulfilled the same role as the kin graves – offering access to the afterlife, which in this case was the larger Christian family in heaven. Irish kin groups were effectively assimilated into a larger Christian kin group.

Another significant convergence of symbolism can be seen in the spatial orientation of Ireland. Ireland was geographically, politically and socially organised in pre-Christian times into the *coiceda* – a division consisting of five pieces. These areas of secular authority were each marked in their centre by a mythical tree and the centre of the five districts by a central stone pillar. This Irish orientation corresponds to Roman traditions of marking the orientation of a settlement around a cross-in-circle motif. There is evidence that Christian Irish settlements such as Armagh conform to this *imago mundi* schemata with cardinal orientations. Quincuncial symbolism is also central to Christian symbolism, most significantly in the wounds of Christ expressed frequently as a *crux gemmata* which conforms to this form. Furthermore, many of the more developed High Crosses show Christ, or symbols of Christ, at the centre of the four cardinal points created by the intersection of the cross pillar and transom. High Crosses have also been demonstrated to have a central role in this settlement organisation, often organised around cardinal axes. We find that High Crosses are located at the centres of market places, and at doors and entrances leading to monasteries. Inconclusive evidence is also offered by the plan from the *Book of Mulling*, which confirms the cardinal use of crosses within monastic settlements. However, this plan does raise the question of the purpose of other freestanding crosses, not considered High Crosses, and how the division of their uses might define and influence their purpose and utility.

While cross-slabs are initially found associated with graves they can be demonstrated to have broader uses. Similar to High Crosses they appear to have several specific functions that reinforce and define spatial organisation. We find the use of *ogam* on some stones in what appear to be statements of hereditary land ownership⁸². It has been argued the High Cross also shares this function with iconic declarations being identified on panels that illustrate land delineation and demarcation scenes, which were performed in part by the priests. This identification can be supported by written accounts of both Saint Patrick and Saint Brigit being involved in the laying out of boundaries on a landscape. These accounts accord with both biblical and Roman practices. A suggestion of this thesis is that

⁸² Limited epigraphic evidence from some High Crosses indicated the ownership or direct patronage of monasteries and royal families.

they were more specifically emulations of the scene of Constantine marking the boundaries of Constantinople, the primary city of the Christian empire. While Constantine completes an essentially Roman practice, it can be connected to the account of Patrick by the inspiration in both accounts of an angel. Furthermore, Constantine uses as a measuring staff a *labarum*, his standard, which is a variation of the ringed cross thought to be closely related to the *chi-rho* symbol. This symbol has been discussed in this thesis as a likely influence on the Irish choice of the ringed crosshead form. Considering the confluence of interrelated factors this adds weight to the consideration that some High Crosses marked secular boundaries and ownership through or under the sphere of the authority of the early Irish church. Additionally, the origins for this practice appear to be modelled from eastern inspirations. It is also possible that, in the same way that the scenes depict land demarcation, other iconographic representations were used to indicate areas of spiritual delineation.

How the crosses accomplished (communicated) this task is uncertain. Obviously, their unique form, decoration and contextual use played a significant role. It is possible that the crosses were seen as guardians that actively watched over boundaries or property rights. We find crosses inside and outside of settlements employed in this capacity. The contexts in which we find them were as prominent as the High Crosses that are found in the centres of market places, or simpler, such as an inscribed Latin cross on an amorphous stone, marking a Christian well in more remote locations. What is not clear is whether the complexity of a cross directly affected its ability to perform a desired role. Setting aside cross decorations and form for a moment, was a freestanding slab, inscribed with a cross, capable of the same meaning as a ringed cross form?

We find freestanding crosses performing a wide range of functions. They were used in a variety of different ways as markers. They were used to assist in pilgrimages, indicating paths and roads and acting as sites of spiritual mediation or memorials. Additionally, they were used to identify graves or graveyards. In combination with the use of *ogam*, some freestanding stones made more explicit statements of land ownership than the iconographic panels found on the High Crosses. Within Christian settlements, they also fulfilled a wide variety of uses, functioning as part of the ecclesiastical furniture. There are also more specific uses predicated by morphology such as being sundials and undoubtedly other uses that we have been unable to decode. High Crosses appear to have been able to fulfil most of these roles but also have been employed in more specific functions. These roles appear to have developed because of the larger settlement sizes and the social interaction that went with them. They are described as places of political and religious asylum; centres for laws and customs; and possibly the enforcement of laws in terms of punishment. This is not to overlook their primary roles as a dominant proclamation of Christianity and centres of spiritual meditation and

teaching. High Crosses appear to have had clearly defined secular and spiritual purposes but also demonstrate considerable versatility.

From this discussion, it is clear that the development and uses of the High Crosses, in contrast to other standing stones, appear to have evolved along with the spiritual, social and economic needs of their roles within social discourse. As monasticism developed and evolved, so did the complexity and use of the High Crosses. In common with other Christian freestanding stones, they functioned as markers, boundary delimiters and memorials on the landscape. However, what appears to set the High Cross apart is not just the scale and complexity of its construction but the nature of its decoration. What is clear is that within settlements crosses appear collectively to communicate an orientation system. This raises the possibility that different combinations of crosses might have had specific meanings. However, the utility of a High Cross was not limited to how 'loudly' it communicated a purpose, but how it communicated the messages, and what these were. The following two chapters will investigate the communication function of the High Crosses. This will be in terms of what audience needs were, and how they drove this development; what communications innovations were created to facilitate the reading of the crosses; and how the Church ensured that its message was being correctly read.

CHAPTER SIX: HOW THE CROSSES WERE READ: LAYOUT AND INTERPRETATION

The previous two chapters have investigated the nature of the monastic context that was responsible for the development of the High Cross. The focus of the previous chapter was on the crosses as a message vehicle that functioned on a competitive media (message) landscape. The Christian use of the freestanding cross appears to have utilised and developed the primary symbolism of standing stones as a device of social, political and spiritual orientation and mediation. The crosses differ from non-Christian stones, in that they appear to have more established codes of use within settlements; and additionally, were capable of conveying more messages. This chapter is concerned with how these different messages communicated from a technical perspective; which appears to have been as much an Irish innovation as the development of the ringed-cross head form. There are four areas pertinent to this discussion: the possibility of tailored messages (images) for different audiences; issues relating to controlling the interpretation (reading) of images; the use of panels on the High Cross to act as a guide to comprehension; and bridging these areas, the role of the medium choice.

Crosses, because they transcend the world of artefact into monument, are often dealt with in isolation from other material artefacts of the time. The discussion so far has indicated that the relationships of the cross integrate it within a broader functional and symbolic context. While most of this study comes back to the primary consideration of what were the crosses used for, it is important to examine the approach and the communication tools that were in used. There are several possible explanations for the development of the pictorial panels found on later High Crosses. The Irish High Crosses could have functioned as a visual substitute to reach the illiterate, who, in a transition stage to Christianity, may have been the lay and non-Latin speaking members of monasteries. Alternatively, they may have been a sophisticated illustration that was intended for to a limited elite audience. An investigation of the nature of the medium and the method of communication can assist in understanding developments that were employed to reach the intended audience and identify the likely nature of the audience.

Focusing on the decoration of the crosses, there are five possible purposes of the decorations of the High Crosses: ornamental; as a statement of belief; a specific symbolic or iconic (composite) in its own right; as an educational or public teaching tool; and with a specific purpose to advertise (promote) elements of church belief and secular declarations. The distinction between the last two classes is very fine. Advertising and Education share a common characteristic that they have codified

content that is premeditated¹. Advertising images can be used to educate and there is no reason why an educational image cannot function as education tools and conveying other messages. However, the processes behind image composition and its message are not necessarily the same when teaching or when making a declaration of secular/religious meaning. There are conscious and unconscious considerations that need to be accounted for in any image creation process.

How should we perceive the role of crosses and their messages in relation to the context that we find them? A semiotic perspective is useful in terms of analysing the *discourse*² between secular and religious institutions and their audiences. Institutions can be defined in relations of power and this is conveyed by discourse. Discourse is the particular mode of the textuality of an institution. Discourse has four principal characteristics: concrete social sites at and within which it circulates; the participant's roles; power relations associated with these roles³; and the topics or themes that are spoken about there. (Thwaites, et al. 1994: 137-157). Socially institutions reproduce themselves through discourse – materially, this is achieved through a medium. Another material consideration is that individuals and social institutions construct their cultural identity through material items which allow for the differentiation between 'self and other' – which is an expression of relations of power and social differentiation (Beaudry, et al. 1996: 279-277).

¹ 'Codification' is where systems of implicit interpretation acquire the status of codes. These code frames represent conventions of identification. They are influenced by socio-cultural considerations (Guirand 1975: 41).

² Discourse Analysis is an influential area of study that has been developed from the theories of Michel Foucault (1972, 1980). A definition of discourse based on his theory has been forwarded by Weedon (1987: 108) as the 'ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern'. Rose (2001:136) offers another perspective on the effect of discourse: discourse refers to 'groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it'.

³ Weedon (1987:113) defines the relationship of power and discourse as 'a dynamic of control and lack of control between discourses and the subjects, constituted by discourses, who are their agents. Power is exercised within discourses in the ways in which they constitute and govern individual subjects'. Additionally, power 'also structures relations between subjects within or across discourses', (Foucault 1980:114). The interactive nature of the definition of power in this context needs clarification: 'Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain, it is never localised here and there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power' (Foucault 1980:96). There are other considerations, Foucault (1977) has also posited that there is a fundamental relationship between power and knowledge. The dominance of a particular discourse is not just related to socially powerful institutions but also in perceptions of the discourse as truth. A discourse's productiveness in social terms is directly linked to whether it is perceived as true (Rose 2001: 139).

In a related study Driscoll (1988:164-167), in analysing the Pictish stones as representations of 'power', has indicated that there is a need to learn to read material culture on the same level as written documents. This is from the perspective that both are actively mediating social relationships – 'artefacts articulate social relations'. He argues that that artefacts are active participants in a culture and should not be considered as passive in that the social meaning of a document or artefact is often created by its 'use, production or discard'⁴. He calls this process *social reproduction*: 'Social reproduction describes the continuous renewal and transformation of the social system including its institutions, patterns of social relations, values, cultural practices and its whole cognitive structure. Social reproduction is achieved through human action of all sorts and is therefore a continuous process' (Driscoll 1988: 167). So in terms of social discourse the crosses as a medium both represent and actively maintain the relationships between audiences and social institutions (Thwaites, et al 1994: 145). However, Beaudry, et al. (1986: 278-279) correctly caution that the 'power' of an artefact should not necessarily be equated to the power of the user/owner. Furthermore, that it is reasonable to assume that artefacts 'can mediate a variety of meanings, often simultaneously'. Related views on the roles of material artefacts have been forwarded by Sadalla and Sheets (1993:157), discussed in the previous chapter, who interpret the social role of the elements of the environment from a dramaturgical perspective. In this case, the crosses would perform on a stage specifically tailored and manipulated to influence a specific audience. Tilley (1996:173) and Franses (1996:268) have also discussed the use of artefacts to articulate and reproduce authority between different strata of society⁵.

It should be recognised that 'social reproduction' is not always a premeditated function of artefact production. Unconscious expressions find their way into the images (Vastokas 1994: 341)⁶. Depicted 'exotic' items within a society differentiate social group membership and are seen to help reinforce the existing social order (Davis 1983: 68; Hodder 1979: 446; Gebauer 1987: 224, 227;

⁴ A similar view on artefacts is forwarded by Orser and Fagan (1995: 73): 'Artefacts need interpretation because they are not simply passive creations. People do not simply make tools, use them, and then forget about them. In fact, artefacts impose structure on people's lives in the same way that people impose structure on an artefact in the process of fashioning it'.

⁵ While there is not space in the present to study to extensively explore discourse analysis, Driscoll (1988) provides a useful synthesis of the development of this perspective and archaeology. Beaudry, et al. (1996) provides a detailed introduction and methodology to using material culture as social discourse. Thwaites, et al. (1994) introduce and develop the use of discourse analysis and medium from a semiotic perspective. Rose (2001) proposes discourse methodologies for the analysis of visual materials.

⁶ This study has already identified that there were several ways the construction of the Irish High Cross could be influenced: they could have been copying models or literary guides; the inexperience of the artist; the artist could have made unguided choices; there might have been foreign artists; directions made by master craftsmen or clerical directors; needs of patrons; constraints of the medium choice; or most likely a combination of these factors.

Driscoll 1988: 168-9; Farr 1994:449)⁷. Doherty (1980: 74) has pointed out that the depiction of a hunting horn on the Cross of Scriptures; Clonmacnois would have been most relevant to the ruling class. These images would also have reaffirmed the social hierarchy's role in society⁸. They form an index of socio-cultural symbolism that indicated cultural membership through an understanding or conventions⁹. An additional consideration is that depicted artefacts can have a polysemous nature; anything created by an individual can have metaphoric as well as literal meaning in society (Beck (1978: 83). The horn can be used literally for calling the hunt within the scene but also advertises the social rank of the user and by association defines the role of those who do not use horns or ride horses.

Eco (1988) employs a useful term of 'background books' to explain the process of interpretation. These 'background books' reflect the cumulative learning and cultural considerations that we use to 'read' new information¹⁰. To this extent, we can expect that there are shared elements of these 'books' along socio-cultural divisions. It is reasonable to assume that a culture would share common elements of awareness on socio-economic lines as well. Local knowledge would also influence the interpretation of images. Gardin (1989) in a discussion of local knowledge and its role in archaeological interpretations believes that in scenes such as this it is likely that a local personality would have been associated with iconographic figures¹¹. An example of this is a possible

⁷ Dallas (1992: 256) has found that social status is frequently advertised through 'the complexity and adornment value of costume' in comparative ethnographic examples.

⁸ Driscoll (1988: 168-179) presents a compelling analysis of the Pictish freestanding stones – and their decoration – as active, and developing, declarations of the 'power' of the ruling class. He suggests that they represent, over time, the developing relationship of between royalty and the church. Notably, he recognises that the stone might have had functional purposes outside of this social role.

⁹ The use of continental status items such as robes or crosiers with little local understanding might have initially resulted in 'aberrant decoding'. Eco (1965) introduces the term of *aberrant decoding* to explain the differences in interpretation when encoders and decoders of a message are not close. This happens – especially with iconic messages – when the code frames are referenced by different cultures, 'for future generations, people of a different culture who would superimpose a different code on the message; (that is what happened in the first centuries of Christianity, and even after, when a pagan image was interpreted as a holy one; the same thing would happen today to an Oriental who knew nothing about Christian iconography and so could mistake an image of St Paul for a warrior, since by convention he carries a sword)' (Eco 1965:105). Eco details other possible causes for aberrant decoding as: language barriers, generational differences, different hermeneutic traditions, different cultural traditions and recognises others he does not discuss. How these images were coded impacts on their decoding and interpretation. Hall (1980:134) refers to codes as guides that promote 'ideal reading'. Therefore, the use of artefacts of local relevance would have aided comprehension and helped to limit the possibility of 'aberrant decoding' and promote 'ideal reading'.

¹⁰ 'The influence of these background books is such that, irrespective of what travellers discover and see, they will interpret and explain everything terms of those books' (Eco 1998:54; 1987; 2000). Sonneson (1999: 15) offers a complementary but broader perspective, suggesting that there is 'a parallel between persons and cultures: the cultural model is an *origo*, a portable centre, by means of which members of a culture »take possession of« the *semiosphere*'.

¹¹ This leaves open the possibility that any one figurative scene might have more than one interpretation – local and biblical.

interpretation, on the south side of the base of the North Cross at Ahenny, as depicting the death of Art, son of Conn King of Tara (A.D. 195), a story recorded in the *Book of Leinster* (Hickey 1955: 118-121)¹². In later versions of the story, Art prophesied the coming of Christianity to Ireland. The depiction of the tale would reinforce the social positions of both the secular rulers and the church.

Sometimes these 'unconscious expressions' have more overt messages that might indicate the deliberate use of local meanings by artists. Nieke (1993: 132-133) in a study of the secular and religious symbolism of penannular brooches notes that a brooch is depicted on Christ in *Ecce Homo* on the South Cross at Monasterboice¹³. Having established the brooch as a symbol of the secular ruling class she believes that this message was deliberately aimed at the ruling class: 'Christ is depicted in dress which would not have been out of place for a secular prince. In depicting Christ thus we again see the church deliberately drawing upon secular precedent and authority to enhance its own position'. She has also identified a panel on the West Cross at Kells, which depicts the Baptism of Christ, where a bystander had a brooch and holds a book.

Another semiotic concept that needs consideration within this discussion is that of *intertextuality*. This concept has been defined by Kristeva (1980: 69) to explain the interrelationship of pre-existing codes, discourse and previous *texts*. For the context of this investigation, this refers not only the relationship of a *text* to other *texts*; this also involves the relationship between different meanings. Her definition involves the interaction of two dimensions: a horizontal connecting the creator and reader of a *text* and a vertical axis that connects the text to other texts. She has proposed that the reading of any text will be influenced by texts of a similar nature. So while we have to consider the role of 'background books', in terms of the creator and cross and cross and reader, we also have to consider another dimension which is the influence of other standing stones (texts) and other figurative/aniconic medium on how they are read. How a cross was read might be influenced (framed) by experiences with other crosses. While this study has explored the consistency of cross form as being a result of the underlying cross symbolism, it is also likely that the intertextual associations with the crosses, in terms of how they were read, contributed to their definition and roles.

¹² Contrary to this, Harbison (1992:12) suggests that this might be a unique depiction of David bringing Goliath's head back to Jerusalem. He links this scene to a similar depiction on the east face of the Cross at Dromiskin. However, he sees the scene as problematic and details other interpretations of the scene.

¹³ This study is a continuation of findings from an earlier collaborative work that discusses penannular brooches (Nieke and Duncán 1988:12-14).

GUIDING THE APPERCEPTION OF IMAGES

When we consider how an audience looks at an image, we are less concerned with perception than with 'apperception' - the process whereby perceived qualities of an object are related to past experience and acquired knowledge - their 'background books'. This implies that perception is a conscious and interactive process and not a passive one. Since interpretation is an unpredictable process, both advertising and educational images employ devices to enforce the decoding of a message in a consistent way¹⁴.

An element that needs consideration is how do you ensure images are perceived as intended? The majority of the images that decorate the High Crosses are Christian in nature as Harbison's survey indicates. However, there are also numerous non-iconographic scenes that Harbison does not explain. But how much of this was understood to be Christian? The prerequisites of representation have been investigated by Greeno & Hall (1997: 362), who have said that, 'for something to function as a representation, people must interpret it to give it meaning. Of course, standard forms of representation are valuable; a sizeable community shares their conventions of interpretation'. Lay viewers of the crosses were probably excluded from the monastic communities' 'conventions of interpretation'. It is also probable that amongst the Christian audience there were different levels of comprehension¹⁵. The answer to this lies in how the images are represented in terms of their content. There were four levels of interpreting the Bible: literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical (mystical) (Eco 1990: 11-12; Link 1995: 36), although Link suggests that the 'heavy four-level machinery was rarely applied to specific works because few people would have understood it, and this is particularly true for the populist paintings and sculptures in cathedrals and churches' (1995: 37). What this leaves open is the question that we have when viewing all 'art' - how much interpretation is too much? ¹⁶ The early Christian church made frequent use of 'hidden' meanings

¹⁴ Eco (1986:147-163; 1990:12-14) discusses the challenges of the early church in controlling its own symbolic code: 'the work of medieval commentators was to provide rules for a correct textual disambiguation' (1990:14). While there is not scope in the present study another area of Eco's work on the concepts of open and closed texts (1979: 8; 1990: 13) is relevant to the role of the reader (audience) and text in terms of 'control' over what is read.

¹⁵ Chapter Four identified there were different types of monastic status within a settlement. It is not unreasonable to assume that those with more mercantile functions were less spiritually educated. This has been identified as a feature of medieval art: 'In medieval art, basically different modes of composition coexist within the same personal or collective style, adopted to different types of content, like the modes in music and verses in poetry. Elements of two such modes may be used within a single image to convey a duality of meanings or to mark an important distinction' (Schapiro 1973: 38)

¹⁶ Augustine investigated the interpretation of Christian symbols. Ladner (1983: 243) in discussing Augustine's approach to early Christian art points out the distinction that Augustine makes between *signia propria* (words) and *signia translata*, the latter functioning as combinations of primary and secondary signification; e.g. 'in the biblical text about the ox who toils and therefore should be fed, the word *bos*, "ox" - which is first a *signum*

behind symbols and signs that have meanings in their own right. Perhaps the most notable of these today is the fish symbol that the proto-Christian church used to coordinate its covert presence within the Roman Empire. It is not clear to what extent the symbolism/imagery was being understood and how this reflects on the audience. It is clear that the early Irish Church used several innovations in order to reach its audiences and guide how works should be read.

Ireland at this time had a largely oral society and the special communication needs this created for the early Church will be discussed in the following chapter – which shall discuss the implications of merging an oral culture with a literate one on the development of the crosses¹⁷. From a technical perspective this appears to be a primary influence on the development of the decoration of the Crosses. The needs of an oral society can be illustrated from an ethnographic comparison. Snow (1997: 335) states: 'Native American children often require holistic, visualised story forms rather than linear, analytic, verbal form of many teacher representations'. The oral nature of pre-Christian society would have made linear oral stories alien in nature (Ong 1982: 46-52). The use of representations would have been a powerful tool in creating a community awareness of key elements of the stories¹⁸. It is a common characteristic of educational systems that 'children are shaped by schools to fit an image defined by the state' (Read 1944)¹⁹. It demonstrates that a flexible and innovative approach was being employed by the early Church to reach the Irish audience. Importantly, it shows an evolution of approaches as the more developed iconographic forms occur on the later crosses.

proprium for a domestic animal - also signifies the spiritual man who deserves to be materially supported because of his labours. Such *signa translata* are more signs or *signa propria*; as the terminology of 'translation' indicates, they are closer to tropes such as metaphor or metonymy'. Within semiotic studies, Petrilli (1986: 226) has identified this as semiotic material which, 'refers to the semantic multivoicedness of the sign, to its *heteroglossia*, to the fact that it may have more than one meaning, to the otherness with respect to itself and to that which is outside it'. Controlling the interpretation of their teachings was a primary concern of the early church. Eco (1990: 11-12) believes that the four levels of interpretation described above were used because, 'the symbolic nature of the Holy Books thus had to be tamed, in order to do so, the symbolic mode had to be identified with an allegorical one'. From a visual perspective, Farr (1994:438) in discussing the decorations of the Book of Kells has suggested that visual depictions were used in order to remove ambiguity from the text and control the interpretive process since the language used was 'secondary for its audience'. This instructive role of images for a written text can be accepted but it does raise questions about the mainly visual panels of the High Crosses.

¹⁷The early Irish church would have come across a language barrier in that Latin was not used before the introduction of Christianity – the Gospels were in Latin.

¹⁸ The later growth of the literate society would have changed this reliance on images as teaching tools. Ong (1982: 130) has identified iconography as a tool that is used for the management of knowledge.

¹⁹ Ong (1982:46-48) has pointed out that oral cultures are homeostatic in contrast to literate cultures in that they live in the present: 'the integrity of the past is subordinate to the integrity of the present'. A written history is not as flexible and reflects the fixed views of the authors.

A primary innovation used by the Church appears to have been in the use of figurative illustrations composed in panels. This was a significant departure from what we know of non-Christian art and early Christian aniconic depictions in Ireland. This study has identified similarities in approach between composing these figurative scenes and the coded nature of advertising. A key characteristic that advertising and the crosses share, separating images that are used in advertising from ornamental ones, is indicated by Saint-Martin (1992: 79) of advertising images: 'a visual illustration that was produced in order to express a previous meaning, previously determined through verbal means'. Saint-Martin (1992: 80) believes that visual advertising has meaning whereas with visual art, 'the fact that an image is not clearly understood does not appear to be a cardinal sin ...one knew in advance its main internationality or its intended message, and to some degree its impact on the audience, while the visual images produced by 'artists' did not appear to be as clearly predetermined and definable'. The complexity of advertising images might be compared to the artistic nature of images has also been discussed by Sonesson who makes the distinction that,

Most advertisement pictures are in fact *visually* much more complex than, for instance, art produced by minimalists. Of course, knowing the latter to be works of art, we will be probably much more prone to project our personal feelings and experiences into them than to the former. What this shows, however, is that the notion of artistic picture is basically a sociosemiotic category...and thus artistry is a point of view which may, in principle, be adopted on any picture (1994: 334).

While the iconographic panels lack the complexity of modern advertising they do appear to share elements of the same coordination of a central theme – that seeks to inform the viewer - that separates it from being solely works of art.

In analysing art from the early Christian period, we are always in danger of over- or -under analysing an image; there is no benchmark for how to deal with images. Part of the complexity is that there is no conclusive context in which they can be placed. There is a grey zone between the folk art and 'intellectual' art of the later medieval period. Problems in interpretation can be illustrated by looking at the scholarly study of High Cross figurative panels. Harbison (1992) survey focused on the iconographical content of the crosses. In the process of discussing the iconographical meaning, he has produced an exhaustive catalogue of his own interpretations and where other scholars differ from his views. In his survey, he often lists up to four different interpretations of the same panel. If

the leading researchers in this area cannot agree on the meaning of these panels does this say anything of the attempts at that time of creation to understand their meaning?²⁰

If we accept that some of the images conform to iconographic types then we are looking at a representational system that was independent of the audience. Although it has been suggested above that the clergy might have performed an 'interpretive' function it is not suggested that they were permanently on hand. Different messages – levels of understanding – taken from the images were dependent on the education of the viewer. The key to decoding images would have been restricted to the extent of the readers 'background books, or someone else's. Furthermore, there are possible intertextual implications on how the crosses were read based on the intertextual experience of the reader from other crosses, media and learnt meanings²¹. The difficulties of understanding potential perception still need investigation.

Sheena Crawford (1987: 21) has defined the process of representation as one that 'must be understood both by the creation of the visual image, and its perception and recognition'. We need to understand to what extent we are to perceive images on the High Cross as conveying information. The answer to this might be in assuming that while the message-content of the iconographic scene was consistent they were expressed as a local execution to assist with identification and relevance²². In discussing representational systems overall, Baines states that, 'representational systems are rarely "value-free"; they are integrated with other important symbolic systems. They are not lightly discarded or modified, and they are thoroughly permeated by values; neither artist nor viewer need separate representational elements from ideological' (1985: 8). The discussion above supports this in that the images on the Irish High Crosses had some local meaning. It would have been perhaps reasonable for local images to act as an introduction to the use of the Christian iconographic image sets. The scenes that showed the familiar such as the hunter with the horn might have been an introduction to the use and interpretation of the medium. However, if we accept that representational systems can be interpreted in different ways this would have presented a significant challenge to the early Irish church to control this message.

²⁰ In some of these cases, weathering can account for the lack of consensus. However, Veelenturf's (1997) recent challenge to Harbison's use on formal characteristics alone to identify iconography does raise the possibility of new interpretations and understanding of thematic considerations.

²¹ How a person more familiar with *ogam* stones read a High Cross might not have been the same as someone who had experience with a *sculptoria* from a medium perspective. Additionally, there significant cultural differences between their use of High Crosses in Ireland and Britain, which might have effected how they were read, this shall be discussed in the following chapter.

²² Gombrich (1977: 154) holds that knowledge in an 'image, conveyed by it and perceived from it, does not operate in a vacuum independent of a wider social sphere'.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPREHENSION AIDS

One of the challenges for the early church was how to introduce not only new content but also a totally new medium format. Innovations were required in order to convey linear stories to a largely oral society. The Irish High Crosses do bring with them certain technical innovations that appear to have been developed 'locally' to assist in comprehension. Certain morphological characteristics appear to have been developed in order to facilitate viewing, or at least to enforcing a mode of reading and contemplation. Before their introduction, Ireland had no publicly accessible monuments that were decorated with a specific visual purpose. It is unlikely that High Crosses were mere transmogrifications of the gospel books into stone, though some appear to have been directly influenced by the painted page. Several innovations have been detailed by this study. Notably, a striking characteristic is the size of these standing stones. Consideration of this development is problematic, if we were to assume that the crosses were mimicking gospel pages, in that some of the panels are placed high on the crosses and others are obscured from view. This does not place all of the panels in a viewable context. This might be offset in that the High Crosses were the first standing stones in Ireland that were decorated on all sides with figurative ornament. It is also possible that different parts of the crosses had content relevant to different audiences²³.

Alternatively, the blanket decoration on less visible parts of the crosses might indicate that the panels had a more decorative purpose. A possible explanation of the scenes at the top of the cross might function with a more talismanic purpose. While it might appear that the panels were difficult to see at the top of the cross, this might have been compensated for by the use of paint to highlight particular types of iconography; or the use of mnemonics, which would make the recitation of the crosses and the panel meanings more accessible. If copybooks were used as templates for the scenes found on crosses, as has been suggested by some scholars, it would not be unreasonable to assume that some form of guidebook might have been available for literate pilgrims and travellers. The placement of images is even more pronounced in later medieval times where figures adorn ceiling and cornices far from noticeable to the casual eye. However, the economy of space that is enforced by the cross is a very different 'canvas' from that of a church.

The other major morphological change that the Irish High Crosses represent in Ireland is the use of plastic figurative decorations. This coincides with the use of plastic decoration in Anglo-Saxon and in Scandinavian art. Notably, Pictish, British and Scandinavian standing stones do not have

²³ The possibility that the crosses had a form of secular division of content has been discussed at the beginning of this chapter and will be discussed in the next chapter in relation to the placement of inscriptions on the bases of the Irish crosses, compared to the Anglo-Saxon examples.

figurative panels. The advantage of this type of technique is that more detailed narrative scenes could be depicted. This unique regional use of figurative stone panels would indicate that the Irish school was independent of these other regions, which is also shown by the unique adoption of the ringed-head cross.

One of the most striking innovations of the Irish High Crosses is the use of panels or frames that are used as 'decoration'. It has been suggested that the panels 'framed in the slab as in a page of a manuscript, gave to these monuments a definite originality' (Mowbray 1936: 428). Henry (1965: 145) believed that the placement of figures in rows derives from the linear perspective of Roman mosaics. She suggests that examples can also be found in late antique silver where hunting scenes show animals of identical size and vertical and horizontal settings. It is likely that traditions of linear placement were part of the artistic vocabulary of the artisans of the time, especially when considering artefacts from the East. However, since there is limited evidence of the Irish production of artefacts, other than gospel books, that conform to this sort of template it is likely that the crosses were more closely related to the gospel books²⁴.

While there some antecedents to the use of panels the Irish originality is defined by the organisation of their content and relationship between the panels. The connection of panels to gospel books can be found by investigating the evolution of the depiction of narrative. There are a few rare examples of images being used adjacent to text on papyrus and later in Bible texts. Weitzmann (1993: 87) in investigating the origins of illustrated biblical story-telling states, 'It cannot be emphasised strongly enough that in illustrating the Bible the Christians did not invent a new branch of art, but continued a then firmly established tradition of Hellenistic-Roman book production'. He believes that early Greek papyrus like the ones found in Oxyrhynchus, now in Oxford, with pictures accompanying text were the origins of this tradition. Referring to the sixth-century *Genesis Fragment* in Vienna, Cod. Theol.Gr.31, he say 'each of its 48 pages left to us are evenly divided between text and picture, an arrangement which resulted in the shortening of the Bible text'. He concludes that 'the *art of storytelling in pictures* became inextricably linked with the history of book illumination' (1993: 83, his emphasis). Considering the stylistic connections between the ornament of the High Crosses and illuminated manuscripts of the time it is likely that the layout influenced the development of the panels on the crosses.

²⁴ It is possible some incised crosses in stone were copied from illuminated manuscripts (Lionard 1961: 98; Harbison 1992: 131-134). The relationship between the illuminated page and stone ornament was discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

However, there are some significant differences between the panels we find on the High Crosses and the use of panels in wider early-medieval practice. It has been suggested that this sort of placements of images might be reflected in the degrading of artistic ability rather than as advancement:

‘The apparent haphazard scatter of representational subjects within a single frame is a feature common to many schools of non-classical art, and is already seen in the late Roman period when the use of perspective starts to be abandoned’ (Hicks 1980: 15).

While Hick’s description can be applied to the bases of the crosses, the shafts and heads of the crosses demonstrate orderly scenes that are simple in their composition. This is most likely because the images here were trying to represent a narrative between the image and the viewer. There is no use of perspective on the Irish High Crosses, though these are carved in relief, which would give them a more defined sense of dimension than incised representations. Figures are depicted in profile and direct views that allows for movements within spatiotemporal dimensions to be illustrated.

GUIDING INTERPRETATION: THE CROSS PANEL AS FRAME

Individual panels were very rare in medieval times (Belting 1990: 9). Belting (1990: 9) warns that, ‘the framed panel has become so much a part of our conception of art that an investigation into its *raison d’être* must be justified’. Frames were not part of the life experience of the medieval viewer. On a functional level, the purpose of a frame is relatively simple: it separates its enclosed subject matter from the background. Kemp (1996: 14) defines the frame in early Christian art as inversion of Friedrich Schlegel’s dictum, ‘Every work of art brings its own frame into existence’ becomes ‘the frame brings the work of art into existence’. Kemp believes that the frame’s task was ‘the organisation of pictorial material. The frame is the necessary presupposition for a composite art, an art of many pictures and of “*figures de relations*”’. There is some consensus in defining the role of the frame. Franses (1996: 263) says that ‘the frame constitutes the image as image, for example by separating it from the world surrounding it’, and Napier (1992: xv), that ‘the frame marks the bounds: it draws the line, it sets the limits within which meaning must manifest itself’.

The presence of the frame is not an essential part of the image composition. Of modern paintings, Duro (1996: 1) holds that ‘we see the artwork, but we do not see the frame’. He sees the function of frames as being more complex:

the frame is both necessary and supplementary, absent and present, an indispensable (if volatile) supplement to an entity that attempts to deny it needs one...the devices that mark the limit of the representation cannot be considered in isolation from what they enframe on the one hand, and

from what surrounds the frame on the other. The supposed opposition between work and frame serves only to conceal the instability of the relation: the frame rhetorises the relationship between inside/outside (of artwork, the text, the discourse) and, to cite the words of Paul de Man used to characterise language, “radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration”. It is in this sense that the frame articulates distinction without ever fixing its relationship with the artwork (1996: 8)²⁵.

In terms of the High Cross the panel frames function in this role. However, an additional consideration is that these panels, were in turn framed by the medium – with its symbolic associations - and furthermore again by the context that we find them.

A functional consideration is that the frame often costs more than the picture (Kemp 1996: 14). This is especially the case with massive masonry monuments²⁶. The relationship between the cross panels and the cross itself are clearly more complex. The second and third chapters of this study have established that the frame (cross), independent of its decoration, had a strong symbolic function. Crosses exist without framed decoration.

Perhaps the relationship between the cross (frame) and the panels is best described by Franses (1996: 263) who defines a frame further: a ‘frame more simply contributes to meaning, indeed, becomes the condition for meaning, that emerges in absentia. The frame separates, but its more crucial task is played not when it separates not the image from the world, but one image from another. In this instance, the frame becomes an instrument of comprehensibility’. It is in this way that the panels on the crosses act to establish, and force, the way that the panels on the cross would have been read. While individual images (panels) could have been viewed in isolation, there is evidence that the decoration of some crosses were thematic in composition. The way that a cross is read is dictated by the layout and the relationship between the panels.

Difficulties in illustrating iconographic narratives can be found in contemporary art to the High Crosses when the use of frames is not employed. This can be illustrated by looking that a similar scene depicted on the silver paten bearing the Communion of the Apostles (Fig. 188) and the apse

²⁵ Paul de Man (1979:10) cited from his *Allegories of Reading*.

²⁶ Although there is an implied economy in creating a permanent record that can be viewed by more than one person at a time when compared to vellum gospel books. This expenditure or investment might have been part of the message. The construction of crosses, as discussed, has been linked directly back to royalty (Harbison 1999; de Paor 1987:154). Following Driscoll’s (1988) association of the Pictish stones as reiterating the social hierarchy of royalty and the church this has implications for the highly developed medium form of the High Crosses. The medium – or frame - had become the message, to paraphrase McLuhan (1964), and can not be considered as neutral or passive in a semiotic or discourse sense.

mosaic, Saint Sophia (Fig. 149). In these similar scenes, we see Christ twice in the one frame on the left and right doing different tasks. The Munich plaque (Fig. 79) shows chronologically different events in the one panel. We see the three women approaching an already built sepulchre instead of a cave and above them Christ is already ascending. These are potentially confusing scenes to the uninitiated.

Why were panels adopted for the High Cross figurative scenes? The use of frames allows the artist to 'differentiate like from like. The frame here is the condition of intelligibility' (Franses 1996: 265). While the panels of the cross are 'clear' iconographic narratives, there is a remarkable use of similar layouts from scene to scene. This shall be discussed in more detail below. Franses goes on to state that

frames came into their own placed in the context of unknown but recognisable likeness, as where several pieces of unfamiliar but similar visual material are concerned. Frames are not the condition of intelligibility when the lexicon is a familiar one; one can dispense with them if viewing audiences are thoroughly acquainted with all the items present...in the absence of an established pictorial vocabulary...confusion would erupt without a frame (1996: 266).

Franses' discussions on the functional aspects of the use of frames are particularly important if we consider that the Irish Crosses did not use inscriptions to help the viewer to decipher the images²⁷. The common use of panels in figurative scenes might have been an attempt to create a lexicon where the visual components would become more familiar²⁸. The intertextual association with other crosses, and other media, would have influenced this process as well.

One specific type of frame found on Irish High Crosses deserves mention. It is the split frame identified by de Paor (1987: 144) and found on twelve High Crosses, e.g. on the Kinnitty High Cross, Co. Offaly (Figs 192 and 193; de Paor 1987: Fig. 8.6). Eight of these crosses are Scripture Crosses and are believed to have been created over a period of 20 years. An example of this is the *Tech Theille* Cross, Co. Offaly where the face of the cross is framed by a continuous bead-mould which turns inward to divide subjects and reverses again, above and below the venture of each panel, in tight hairpins. The exact purpose of this might have been as a framing technique as described above or as a mechanism that was copied from some template. The dating of its inscriptions places this cross's creation at AD 846-862.

²⁷ The use of inscriptions in combination with Cross decoration will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

²⁸ The analysis of the animals in Data 160-175 illustrates that the formal use of some animals was almost exclusively linked to some iconographic scenes, which would indicate recognition of an archetypal animal would mean identification of a scene.

NON-IRISH USE OF PANELS

Where did the use of panels originate? There are some examples of the use of panels in non-Irish public art. There is an early Roman example of the use of panels (frames) as a technique to coordinate the narrative process. Kemp (1996: 17-18) in discussing the door at Santa Sabina, Rome, discusses an example where the frame is secured within the structure of the door (Figs 189, 190). Pope Sixtus III consecrated the church shortly after A.D. 432 (Delbrueck 1993: 17). Here the 'images' are organised around the two axes: the horizontal and vertical breakdowns creating the narrative (Fig. 191). In terms of shared structural features, it is worth emphasising that the linearity followed by both narrative orders is not without the higher seal of approval of the systematic order: each row is tantamount to being a sectional or strophic division of the narrative into chapters or books. Kemp makes the important distinction that the use of frames in early Christian art did not conform to our own way of seeing frames:

the complex pictorial system, determined in equal measure by framing and change of format, does indeed have an involvement with time, but not in the sense of those narrative properties that the nineteenth and twentieth century cultivated - sequentiality and acceleration (Toepffer) and/or simultaneity and contrastive value (Eisenstein). This portal is, rather, imbued with the Christian notion of ranging across all temporal levels (Old Testament, New Testament, and the eschatological future), of their vertical correlation and horizontal logic. The configuration of the framework is both expression and the means of a theology that finds its revelation in history: One could say that the immanent aim of such achievements in structuration is not the temporal figure (Toepffer, Eisenstein), but the historical one (1996: 19).

The use of frames to help create temporal contexts was discussed earlier in this chapter.

There is another tradition of panels found on eastern pillars that needs to be discussed. This shall be discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter but there are striking similarities between the panels found on Irish Crosses and those found in Armenia and Georgia. Armenian and Georgian early Christian cultures, have been seen by Richardson (1984a: 131-134; 1987; 1990; 1994; Henry 1964: 40) as influences on the origins of the Irish traditions. Both Armenia and Georgia erected monumental standing stones in the fifth and sixth centuries (1990: 17-18). Der Nersessian (1977: 68) has discussed the similarities between Georgian and Armenian sculptures in detail.

Richardson (1987: 129-130) has been able to establish that the Irish knew about Armenia and it is likely that contact of some form occurred, directly or indirectly. She points out that as the Irish had

the ringed-head form, the Armenians had their own national form called a *kebachk'ar* that functioned as a cross stele between the fifth and seventh centuries. However, it should be noted that in size these never compete with Crosses and resemble cross-slabs not the High Cross form. This cross form is superficially similar to the Irish High Cross form: 'they both represent artistic conceptions of strong individual type formulated within a particular culture' e.g. Fig. 137²⁹. Armenia, like Ireland also has a tradition of placing pillars in stone bases (Fig. 162). The iconography of some Armenian crosses is similar to the subject matter of the High Crosses and is displayed in panels (Richardson and Scarry 1990: 22), as is shown on the Odzun pillars (Fig. 163). Furthermore, a school of architecture from Armenia, called the Lori school, 'incorporates raised bosses and imitates applied metal work'.

Additionally, Richardson has also found similarities between the Ahenny Capstones and the use of domes in Armenian art (1984a: 131). Domes are frequently found in the architectural background of Armenian manuscripts of this time, compare Figs 31 and 123. A Georgian pre-altar cross from Goridjvari from the thirteenth century is presented as an example of a domed capstone (Richardson and Scarry 1990: 26). The Armenian/Georgian sculptural traditions show remarkable parallels to Irish developments at the same time. However, striking as the similarities are, there are also some notable differences. While the structural developments of a consistent cross form, socketed bases, panelled decoration all are related to the High Crosses these could be a parallel evolution using a similar technological background or inspiration. A consideration is that Armenia and Georgia could have been exposed to the same influences that commenced the Irish traditions. One of the most striking similarities between the two traditions is the use of four sides to represent panelled scenes. Each of these regions was exposed to Coptic art as well, for example compare figures 164 and 165.

There are elements that we do not find on Armenian structures. There are no ringed heads or perforated structures. Additionally, the socketed bases also do not appear to have been as developed as the Irish versions, which might indicate that they were a separate interpretation of the socketed base described that was by Arculf. In terms of decoration, the iconographic panels at Odzun show only scenes from the Old Testament. These are common depictions on paleo-funerary art in the region (Der Nersessian 1977: 66)³⁰. The depiction of scenes is also different. On the Armenian pillars the figures are all shown frontally (Der Nersessian 1977: 66); whereas Irish figures are depicted frontally and in profile. This would indicate that the Irish crosses had a more developed narrative

²⁹ It is also worth noting that the *Kachk'ar* looks like a *crux florida* (floral cross) a cross form that was very rare in Irish sculpture (discussed in Chapter Two).

³⁰ This would indicate that they have more in common with Pictish decoration than Irish iconography, which makes use of both Testaments for subject matter.

style – technically allowing for spatio-temporal considerations. Due to the inconsistencies between the two traditions this might mean that – while inspired by common sources – it is more likely they are examples of the convergent evolution of monumental styles. This tradition of crosses will be revisited in the concluding chapter of this study.

THE IRISH HIGH CROSS: CONTEXT AS FRAME

Another important feature to recognise when discussing frames is that they do not necessarily have to directly relate exclusively to the material picture. Duro discusses this in terms of the impact of museums:

Museums work to enframe not only artefacts, but also beholders. The museum serves to define our expectations, discipline our desires, and produce a past and a future to define our eternal presentness...the idea of the museum as *parergon* to the artwork undermines the dichotomy of form and content. Between text and context, *différence* is at work undoing the idea of a frame that serves only to detach the inside from the outside (1996: 6)³¹.

From an anthropological perspective, Napier (1992: xvi) also forwards an interpretation that frames create a context of interpretation beyond that of the physical border of art, ‘the ritual markings of boundary sets the limits within which real objects become supernormal, where events take place that, otherwise, might have passed as a normal part of the real world or might even have gone unnoticed’. Napier believes that the use of boundaries or frames can delineate ‘ordinary space’ so that actions or objects within that context can take on extraordinary meaning. The ‘frame marks out the difference between image and imagination’ (1992: xvi).

If we consider the context of the High Crosses, their environment and socio-cultural discourse, these factors would have acted as a frame to the perception and utility of the High Crosses. The preceding chapters identified the monastic settlement as the context and that the High Cross played a central role in the orientation of the settlement. The cardinal positioning of the crosses creates and interpretive framework for the cross form and the iconographic themes of Christ, in which orientation plays a central role. This study has reached a similar conclusion to McGuire and Clark (1987: 45) that within the development of the early Christian church, the stone crosses were an

³¹*Parergon* (by work) refers to the term employed by Jacques Derrida (1987), a pioneer of deconstruction analysis, who seeks to identify the frame as the separation of the work ‘*ergon*’ from everything else. This is with the aim of investigating the discourse that occurs outside of the frame and gives meaning to what is inside. The *parergon* represents the space between the work and the background. The nature of the *parergon* is not limited to physical concepts but also includes mental concepts that effect perception and meaning.

'interim' step between the establishment of Christianity in the seventh century and the construction of churches as permanent homes of preaching in Britain. This suggested purpose of the crosses can be developed further. This 'interim step' in Ireland could also be explained as being the transitional phase of Christianity moving from a pre-Christian belief system to that of the established church system. However, there is a danger in applying the term 'interim' since this retrospectively implies there was an expectation of building churches, of which there is no evidence.

It is also an essential part of the Judeo-Christian church that man and nature are separate. The interior of a church removes us from nature. While the early Christian clergy might have been able to compensate for the differences in the religions by aggressively adopting and incorporating non-Christian characteristics, the context associated with religious devotion would have been one of the most difficult to integrate into the belief system. The use of a pillar/cross instead of a building as the focus of religious practice might have had that specific purpose. We know that the word *kyle* is a form of the Irish word for *Cill* (church). The word was commonly used in the south of Ireland; half of the areas named *kyle* are woods and not churches (O hÉailidhe 1967: 103, Plummer 1910: clv). These areas could refer to open areas used by the churches for masses³². Furthermore, the decline in the erection of crosses coincides with the increase in architectural size of the churches, which could accommodate more people. This might reflect a decreased need to compensate for non-Christian needs.

The reason why only some of the freestanding crosses are decorated might have been that they were an attempt to create an 'inverted' church³³. Where the insides of churches are usually richly adorned, in this case the Crosses were decorated on the outside. This may have resembled what the indigenous peoples would have considered a religious context (frame for interpretation). The congregations focused around the centre, reflected in the intersection of the transom and shaft through the ring of the cross. This was again duplicated in the placement of the cross within the

³² Christian worship associated with trees can also be identified to practiced but not with the tree as the focus of devotion. This is illustrated in the *Martyrology of Oengus* (Stokes 1905: 11; my emphasis) where it states that: 'Oengus, then, was an humble, lowly servant of God, and 'tis he that used to chant his psalms thus, while he was at Disert *Oengusso*, to wit, fifty in the river with a wither round his neck and tied to the tree; fifty under the tree, and fifty in his cell'. Considering the preceding discussion on the relevance of trees, it appears that some devotions were orientated around the tree as *heirophany*. Furthermore, from the same text there is a reference under May 7-12 of the 'tree of the church'. However, caution should be exercised in how we perceive the role of trees in this context; this can be compared to a passage for April 20-28, which differentiates the tree as idol from *locus* for spiritual focus, 'The feast of the saints of Europe. That is, a great tree there was in Rome; and the heathen worshipt it, till the Christians fasted on the saints of Europe that the tree might fall, *et statim cecidi?*' (Stokes 1905: 119).

³³ Where churches are seen as microcosmic recreations of the *imago mundi*, the alternative way of orientating a community to the 'centre' is to focus on an *axis mundi* – usually in the form of a pillar (Eliade 1958; 1959)

monastery walls that were usually circular³⁴. All of these are frames that act to separate the early Christian practice from the non-Christian. The concept of the inverted church will be revisited in the final chapter in relation to eastern influences and developments of the medium form.

CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the evolution of communication functionality of the crosses that progresses concurrently with the development of the cross form. This investigation has focused on several areas: how the messages were tailored and why; how this new format of representation was introduced; how control over interpretation was guided; and specifically how panels were used in the development of a pictorial narratology. This exploration of these technical developments has allowed for a more detailed impression of the needs of the audience(s) to be established and in turn allowed for insights what was driving changes in some of the features of the High Cross from the creator's perspective.

This thesis has identified that there were messages of both a secular and spiritual nature within the Christian 'frame' of the High Cross. While some features that appear targeted at a secular audience might be explained as unconscious expressions of the artists; however, this is unlikely to explain all occurrences³⁵. Secular messages appear to take the form of artefacts and contextual associations that would have been most relevant to the ruling classes³⁶. From the secular perspective, exotic cultural items, largely restricted their class would have been elements of identification of most relevance to them. It should be recalled that Patrick's conversion of Ireland was achieved by the converting the socio-political hierarchy before using that as a basis to expand the Churches influence. Considering that the more secular nature of some depictions this might suggest that the crosses had both secular and clerical audiences.

More specifically, because of the audience's 'background books', items of local secular significance could possibly have been used to limit 'aberrant decoding' – limiting misinterpretation. This might have been for three reasons. The first is that Roman or eastern depictions of dress or other cultural items, being unfamiliar to the Irish, might have raised barriers to understanding or comprehension of

³⁴ In the last chapter the organisation of mass detailed in the *Stowe Missal* (AD 800) has been identified to conform to this symbolism (O Dwyer 1981: 153-157).

³⁵ There is also a possibility that there were non-Christian messages but that is not the focus of the present study.

³⁶ Alternatively, if seen, and understood, by a lay audience they would have reinforced the existing social hierarchy and the relationship between church and ruling class.

the Christian teachings. The second reason is that iconic scenes, especially on the base, might have been educational in purpose – employing familiar figurative elements as an introduction to the interpretation of more complex scenes. It is possible that this went as far as identifying some of the participants on panels with local identities. Thirdly, from a discourse perspective, they help define and reinforce social relations of power. It is important to recognise the tailored local content of the cross construction because it establishes that regardless of the extent of the foreign influences in the creation of the High Crosses that they were still being adapted to be meaningful and relevant to the local audience. An additional feature that needs to be considered is that we can expect some intertextual benefit from a viewer being able to decode and understand one panel to understand another panel scene. The intertextual nature of the cross depictions as a medium also would help with the interpretation of other crosses as a genre.

Some of the communication challenges evident in the development of the crosses were not limited to them alone. More widely, the early church struggled with defining the boundaries on the interpretation of its own symbolic code. Consideration of the breadth of the ‘background books’ of a reader of a cross panel in terms of how much they apperceive, is important to understanding the nature and differentiation of the High Cross audience. Clearly, we can assume that the more educated members of a community were capable of reading the crosses. It is likely that what was being read was directly relational to the type and extent of the reader’s education, much as it is today. It is possible to entertain that one scene could have more than one interpretation and was capable of being interpreted in different ways. Furthermore, combinations of scenes could have cumulatively created meaning. This coded nature of the iconographic scenes indicates that they were closer to visual advertising in creative process and intention than as an artistic expression. Like modern advertising, they used elements that assist in a target audience to identify with representation in a consistent manner – decreasing resistance and barriers to the images coded ‘call to action’.

The choice of message format on panels, with a few exceptions, was either iconic or aniconic. The use of an iconic message system can be demonstrated to be most effective in reaching an oral society. This feature of the communication needs of the audience will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter. However, since the more elite members of the clergy would have been able to read and write Latin it does indicate that any audience of the crosses might have included monastic tenants and the secular elite who could not read and write. The utility of the crosses is not limited to those who knew Latin; there are other ways that the scenes could have been read. It is possible that the clergy were on hand to assist in interpretation. It is also possible that guidebooks, similar to the pattern books discussed in Chapter four for decoration guides, were used for more detailed readings.

Alternatively, some mnemonics might have been taught and employed. How and what was being read shall be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

This chapter has been able to identify certain features that appear to have been developed specifically in order to facilitate reading: the public size of their construction; contextual location; use of plastic ornament; adoption of figurative iconic art; and the innovative use of panels. Panels utilised plastic ornament to show figures in frontal and side perspectives allowing of spatiotemporal dimensions to be illustrated. This allowed more complex narratives to be developed as teaching tools. Panels appear to have been adopted in order to differentiate discrete narrative scenes. Significantly, panels acted as a frame for their message content.

The use of frame, while familiar to our contemporary perceptions of art, was rarely found in early medieval art. Other early medieval art lacks the pictorial organizational distinction between the participants and the spatiotemporal considerations of the narrative they are depicting. An oral society needed a communication medium that was both visual and holistic – that can illustrate the functional relationship between parts and the whole – which a written story does not provide. The Irish use of the frame/panel assists in the contents comprehension and intelligibility that appears tailored for an oral or illiterate audience. It also indicates the extent of the thought and planning that was invested behind how best to communicate to this audience. Since iconic scenes are found on later crosses this might indicate an evolution in approaches.

The origins of these figurative communications are uncertain. Certainly the Irish artist were exposed to figurative art from trade and pilgrimage items but there do not appear to have been any examples of their use to communicate coordinated iconographic themes or narratives. It is likely that there was some influence from the format of the gospel books in terms of depicting scenes as pages. The use of iconic panels appears to be a later development with the more accomplished examples being found on the more developed crosses. Alternatively, this might have been because of new technical advances, better stone for carving, driven by audience requirements, or a combination of these factors. While there are some earlier continental examples these do not appear to be where the Irish tradition originates. The Armenian and Georgian crosses, while similar, can be more realistically explained as the result of the convergent evolution that as being directly related. Considering the less developed panels of these eastern traditions- with only frontal scenes, less skilled carving and only Old Testament iconography – they appear to be developmentally behind Irish traditions. These similarities between these traditions will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this study.

This chapter has focused on elements of the crosses that were implemented to assist in communication of the early churches message; in particular, the importance of the development of the panel as a reading guide. However, while possible types of audiences have been discussed, the nature of the need that was driving these particular developments is still unclear. It is the suggestion of this thesis that the crosses were more than just an interim step awaiting the construction of churches. They also functioned as more than just a static billboard or display is for Christian teachings. The High Crosses were developed specifically to satisfy the media and contextual needs of their local audience. This can be concluded by looking at several factors presented in this thesis. It has been suggested in this thesis that the construction and subsequent experimentation and development of the High Cross form was an Irish innovation, designed to bridge the contextual expectations of a community that associated worship with the outdoors and around trees and stones. In this case, the medium was changed to suit a local audience – the cross functioned as an inverted church. This would have compatible with the perceptions and associations of a community that did not see religious experiences framed by a building, but of a community orientated around a focus of worship and congregation in the open. Additionally, the use of iconic representations appears to have been tailored to reach an oral or illiterate society. This represents a communications innovation independent of the official church communication medium – Latin. The technical developments detailed in this chapter indicate that the early Irish church was proactively trying to reach their new audience on terms they understood.

The following chapter will focus on the nature of the communications and how this was tailored for the audience. This will involve an investigation of the communication restrictions and needs of a belief system, based on books, in communicating in a different language to an essentially oral culture. This investigation will indicate that a primary role of the cross was to act as an intermediary within this communication divide.

CHAPTER SEVEN: WHAT WAS BEING READ - THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION

The preceding chapter investigated the technical innovations that were employed in creating the High Crosses to assist in communicating the Church's message. While the last chapter focused on the cross as medium, this chapter will focus on the needs of the audience as reader (interpreter) of the message. This section will focus on the nature of the types and content of communication that were used on standing stones in Ireland and what this says about both the makers and audience of the High Crosses. The Irish High Crosses as part of the visual culture of the early Christian period were part of a complex and rapidly evolving arsenal of material objects that were employed by the early Church to attract, convert, and educate and confirm the masses to their message. The chapter will attempt to define the requirements of the audience for these messages. Furthermore, to detail how their role within the communication system affected the development of the Irish High Crosses.

In order to gain a better understanding of the medium content and format of the High Crosses, it is necessary to investigate the characteristics and limitations of the non-Christian oral culture in Ireland from the Church's perspective. One of the suggestions of this study is that the unique cross form and decorations of the High Crosses were a direct response to the unique needs of this culture. By differentiating the content of the written message from iconic and aniconic communication we can gain a broader understanding of the varied use of standing stones during this time. The focus of this investigation will be on public communication rather than private. Since there is no physical evidence of the preceding oral culture, insights can be gained by exploring the use of all forms of visual communication: written, aniconic and iconic¹. In terms of written language use in Ireland Latin, vernacular and a 'local' script called *ogam* are found on freestanding stones. The use of these forms of visual-verbal communication assists in establishing the core purposes of the crosses. The role of the church and the clergy in the reading and interpretation of the crosses will also be explored within the context of other socio-cultural discourse at this time.

THE IRISH CHURCH: ATTITUDES TO COMMUNICATION

Pre-Christian Ireland was an essentially oral culture. The introduction of Christianity brought with it for the first time the widespread use of the written word. The pre-Christian belief system used memory and oral tracts to communicate in comparison to Christianity, which is based on the written

¹ The use and nature of iconic and aniconic decorations have been discussed earlier in this study.

word². Although there are some difficulties in accurately dating the Irish material record (Mytum 1992: 103) and the dating of epigraphic evidence has also proven itself to be difficult (Ó Ríordáin 1942: 144; O Murchadha 1988; Swift 1994), the sheer absence of epigraphic evidence in pre-Christian times speaks for itself³.

It is clear that the Irish monasteries took the concept of how to communicate very seriously. Umberto Eco (1998b: 14) has suggested that 'Christian culture began to re-read, with heightened interest, the biblical pages on the *confusio linguarum*, that momentous event that took place during the construction of the Tower of Babel'. He believes that they were trying to rediscover or re-invent a Pre-Babelistic language. Around the middle of the seventh century, a grammatical treatise appeared in Ireland with the title of *Auraicept na n-Éces* - 'The Precepts Of Poets' (Eco 1998b: 20). Eco explains that 'the fundamental idea of this treatise is that in order to adapt the Latin grammatical model to Irish one must imitate the structures of the Tower of Babel'⁴. The precepts describe the 72 wise men of the school of *Fenius Forrsaid* who planned the reconstruction of the pre-Babel language. Eco suggests that this movement was inspired by Isaiah 66:18, 'I shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues'. Poli (1989: 187-9 translated and cited in Eco 1995: 16-17) states of *Auraicept* it

shows the action of the founding of this language...as a "cut and paste" operation on other languages that the 72 disciples undertook after the dispersion...It was then that the rules of this language were constructed. All that was best in each language, all that that was grand and beautiful, was cut out and retained in Irish.... Wherever there was something that had no name in any other language, a name for it was made up in Irish.

Eco (1998b: 23) clarifies this influence 'Irish grammarians did not decide to go back in time, in order to find, retrieve and restore a lost Adamic language, but decided rather to construct a totally new and quite original perfect tongue, to be identified with their own national idiom'. In discussing the *Auraicept* McManus (1991: 148) states that its, 'main concern was to compare Irish in as favourable a light as possible with the language of the Western Church'. He believes that as Latin and Greek scholars looked to their alphabets to study their own alphabets, Irish scholars looked to *ogam*, more specifically *Beithe-luis-nin*, for theirs. McManus (1991: 149) provides a detailed discussion on the 72

² 'To the Druidic scholar memory and the spoken word were the vehicles of learning; to the Irish Christian writing and the written word became paramount and necessary' (McNally 1969: 10)

³ Stevenson (1989: 129) has argued that it is likely that there was some limited pre-Christian literacy amongst mercantile communities in Ireland before the fifth century.

⁴ From the *Auraicept na n-éces* 'What are the place, time, person and cause of Gaelic? Not hard. Its place the Tower of Nimrod, for there it was invented first. Its time the time of building the Tower by Adam's children.' (trans. Calder 1995:3). The text details the 72 races from the Tower of Nimrod, the 72 languages, the 72 disciples that each studies a language. (trans. Calder 1995:19)

scholars: 'their legend is a typical product of its time and is important not as a record of "authentic" history but rather as a document expressing the attitudes and aspirations of its framers'. McManus believes it was in this context that *ogam* was created. What is important is that the *Auraicept* demonstrates that the Irish were, or perceived themselves as, challenging the way that people communicated. This spirit led ultimately to the highly developed and innovative narrative figurative panels on the High Crosses.

As with other Christian countries, the dominant language of the church was Latin. Many of the extant Irish documents are written in Latin. While not central to this discussion, it is worth noting that studies on early Irish Literature are divided into two schools of thought. The 'nativist' school of thought perceives the older Irish narratives and laws as reflecting non-Christian and oral traditions, characterised by being written in the vernacular; this is compared to ecclesiastical writings and laws that were written in Latin. The grounds for the separation of these literary traditions have been substantially challenged in recent years from a number of perspectives. This has been primarily led by Ó Corráin (1984a, 1984b, 1989), who has argued that by the sixth-century there is evidence for widespread borrowing and interaction between the two legal systems (1984a: 157)⁵. Rather than a separation based on literary traditions, Ó Corráin has suggested that: 'The church scholars, grammarians (of Latin and Irish), poets, canonists, lawyers and historians formed a single mandarin caste whose writings, in Latin and in Irish, are the products of a single, if broad-based and broad-minded, ecclesiastical culture. That is not to say that all poets and lawyers became clerics, but rather than these disciplines were fitted into the ecclesiastical order of things and literate ecclesiastics because the masters of the professions' (1989:12). More recently, this characterisation of the literary culture has been challenged as '...an invitation to 'homogenize' it excessively, ignoring possible distinctions of language, genre, authorship, and chronological developments' (Sims-Williams 1996: 192)⁶. With the focus on communication-systems development in mind, while Ó Corráin, et al. are primarily concerned with the authorship of texts, from the sixth-century onwards it is worth noting that the introduction of Latin to Ireland might not have been solely in the hands of the church.

⁵ The nature of this relationship was investigated again in 1984 in a collaborative study 'The Laws of the Irish' (Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen 1984) which is able to point to close relationships between secular and canon laws. Breatnach (1984) has argued further for the clerical involvement of secular legal texts in terms of prose style and where the traditions borrow from each other. Additionally, he raises family connections between the three compilers of the *Bretha Nemed* as indicating that 'we can hardly speak of secular law-schools that are uninfluenced by Christianity' (1984: 459). Although, it is likely that this relationship between secular and ecclesiastical was reciprocal; it is worth noting that there is also plenty of evidence that the prevailing Irish secular social systems had a significant impact on Christian church practices (MacNiocaill 1984: 154; Charles Edwards 1984: 174).

⁶ A more detailed summary of anti-nativist point of view has completed by McCone (1990); Sims-Williams (1996) has completed a review that argues for a more moderate appraisal of this work and provides a useful synthesis of discussions in this area.

Literacy might have commenced in secular spheres – predominantly mercantile - a century earlier (Stevenson 1989: 129). Furthermore, the extent of the churches control over the teaching of written communications has been questioned by Charles-Edwards (1980), who raised the possibility of literary education occurring outside of the church environment. This might have implications in terms of the education of artists that might fall outside of religious circles and the comprehension of religious themes. Additionally, the education of audiences of the High Crosses and as a result how these visual representations were interpreted.

As well as locally produced works, imported texts would have had important roles in Church teaching⁷. The influential works of Isidore of Seville reached Ireland in the seventh century (Hillgarth 1961: 449-51; 1962: 185, 192-3; 1984; MacLean 1986: 179). Works such as this would have provided fresh inspiration to the developing monastic traditions. The introduction of monasticism also brought around the advent of written law. Scribes became increasingly important at this time within the Christian communities, as is indicated in the *Annals* (Flower 1954: 88-89).

INSCRIPTIONS: *OGAM*

In terms of the public use of inscriptions, standing stones appear to be the main public method of displaying written language. However, this use of words never competed, in terms of overall content, with aniconic or iconic depictions. There appear to have been specific contexts in which the different languages were used on standing stones in general. A 'local' script called *ogam* was in use in early Christian period, roughly at the same time that Latin was adopted. *O gam* was a script peculiar to the insular region, mainly inscribed on standing stones (Figs 183, 184) but found in some manuscripts. Understanding the development, use and limitations of *ogam* in Ireland can help shed light on the Christian and non-Christian use of standing stones as a medium. It also represents the dominant 'written' medium content found on standing stones in Ireland. The *ogam* stones have traditionally been interpreted as sepulchral in purpose (Plummer 1923: 387; Thomas 1971: 95; Nash Williams 1950: 6; Morris 1983: 30). In translation, they appear to have commemorative functions, e.g. a person is named followed by an ancestor (Ó Ríordáin 1942: 82).

Most scholars agree that the earliest examples of *ogam* first occur in either the fourth century (Mitchell 1976: 171; Thomas 1971: 94; Thomas 1987: 8; Carney 1975: 54; Nash Williams 1950: 4; Binchy 1961) or in the fifth century (McManus 1991: 1). More recently Thomas (1994a: 33) has

⁷ Most importantly for Christianity, there was a need for written (copied) versions of the Bible (Bethell 1981: 43, Stevenson 1989: 134).

suggested that *ogam* was firmly established in the fourth century but 'could have been invented about A.D. 300 (or even before)⁸. Notably, the *ogam* script is not found exclusively in Ireland. *Ogam* stones have been found in Ireland, Wales⁹, Cornwall, and the Isle of Man¹⁰ with some doubtful examples from Scotland¹¹ and England (McManus 1991: 44; Fig. 46; Morris 1983, Fig. 10) (see Maps 12 and 13). Irish *ogam* stones are rarely bilingual but those found in Western Britain are (Hamlin 1982b: 283; Morris 1983: 28-30); seventy-five percent of which are found in Wales¹² (Morris 1983: 30). The overall distribution of the *ogam* stones was over a broad region most affected by the non-Patrician spread of Christianity in Ireland (Thomas 1987: 8). The exact number of surviving Irish *ogam* stones varies but it is thought to be between 330 (Hamlin 1982b: 283) and 350 (Cuppige 1986: 247; Harbison 1991: 84). The main concentration of these is in Munster: with 125 in Kerry, 80 in Cork and 47 in Waterford (Hamlin 1982b: 283; Ó Ríordáin 1942: 82; de Paor 1993: 34).

The implications of the introduction of the script relate directly to who was using the script: non-Christian or Christian. Who created the script is also uncertain (MacManus 1991: 1). However, it is generally accepted that its origins can be found in the Latin alphabet (MacManus 1991: 55; Thomas 1971: 94). It is related to 'tally sticks and the Roman numeral system of incremental strokes, as a main inspiration, and at least one inventor familiar with Latin grammatical theory' (Thomas 1987: 8). The use of *ogam* declined with the introduction and versatility of the Latin script (Hamlin 1982b: 286).

Controversially, it has been suggested that *ogam* predates the introduction of Christianity to Ireland (Carney 1975: 53-65; Ó Ríordáin: 1942: 81). McManus who places the use of *ogam* stones to the fifth century has substantially challenged this view: 'they don't survive into the Christian period, they start with it' (1991: 60). Contrary to this chronology, Mytum (1992: 54-55) believes that there is not a secure enough dating of any *ogam* in order to determine the date of its introduction. Additionally, Thomas (1994a: 32-33) has questioned the link between Christianity and *ogam*: '*ogam* is only a manner of writing, no more tied to any one religion than the Morse Code'. If Thomas is correct, this throws into question 'who' the intended audience of the *ogam* script were and the use of some standing

⁸ This date is also provisionally forwarded by Stevenson; based on the treatment of the Latin number V having an *ogam* equivalent Stevenson (1989:142) concludes that this 'offers the possibility that the *ogam* alphabet was created considerably before the fourth century'.

⁹ The Welsh *ogams* have been dated to the fifth century or later (Morris 1983: 28-30; Thomas 1994a: 37).

¹⁰ The *ogam* that are found at the Isle of Man have been connected back to Irish groups as well, e.g. an *ogam* stone from Ballaqueeny, Rushen (Cross 2; K2 – late fifth century) (Cubbon 1982: 259).

¹¹ The thirty-five *ogam* inscriptions from Scotland have been dated from the sixth century (Forsyth 1994: 237).

¹² A warrior tribe, the *Dési*, who served the *Eóganachta* are believed to be responsible for the spread of *ogam* to Wales (de Paor 1993: 34; Ó Cróinín 1995: 19; Nash Williams 1950: 5).

stones. Furthermore, another consideration is that even if Christian in creation this does not always ensue that it only ever used by Christians – just as Latin was not.

Who was using *ogam* is a very polarising area in its study. The traditional arguments for *ogam* being a non-Christian script revolve around several elements of their use. The first of these is that the inscriptions do not demonstrate Christian sentiment in their formulae as, they use an older style of speech and they are found almost exclusively on non-Christian styles of standing stones. It has been suggested that they were created by non-Christians, to compete with the growing influence of the expanding Christian church (Macalister 1914; 1928); supported by evidence of the deliberate destruction of *ogam* accompanied by the presence of crosses¹³. McManus believes that these facts do not necessarily mean that the stones were non-Christian¹⁴. He discounts the possibility of a sixth-century school of non-Christians using *ogam* because by that time most of the Irish were learning Latin and had already embraced Christianity (1991: 57-59). Furthermore, Hamlin (1982b: 286) has pointed out that *ogam* was an unsuitable script for the oral language tradition that preceded Christianity¹⁵. This raises questions about the utility of the script.

While unsuitable as a script for an entire oral tradition this does not discount it as a development tailored for a more precise use in relation to the Irish language. McManus (1991: 59) believes that the purpose of the script has been misunderstood, 'there is a good reason to believe that the *ogam* alphabet was designed specifically as a vehicle for the Irish language, not as a cypher to the Latin alphabet, and its design was executed under the influence of Latin learning'. He states that its primary function would have been to record Irish names, which the Latin script was unable to do¹⁶. *Ogam* and Latin would have complemented each other as monumental and literary scripts. Carney (1975: 63) earlier forwarded a different view, suggesting that *ogam* stones were a cypher that would not have made sense to readers used to the Roman alphabet. It is clear that, if this were a Christian

¹³ MacManus (1991: 56-57) finds the assumption that Christians were damaging *ogam* stones because they had the name MUCOI hard to substantiate; also dismissed by Stevenson (1989:140), who attributes this to weathering, cattle rubbing and 'random accidents'. MUCOI was the name of a pagan deity (MacNeill 1907) and this is why it has been cited as evidence of the pagan use of the script. McManus points out that MUCU or MUCCU in Latin have the meanings of 'copy' but more importantly he does not believe that MUCOI was targeted more than any other *ogam* text when looking at all of the damaged inscriptions. Alternatively, Byrne (1971: 153) has argued that this decline in the use of MOCCU reflects a change in Irish self-perception as belonging to part of a tribe with an ancestral deity by the end of the seventh century.

¹⁴ There is an *ogam* inscription on a stone from the Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry dated as early as the fifth, probably the sixth century, that states 'the priest Ronán son of Comgán' (Stevenson 1989:139).

¹⁵ A view that is supported by Stevenson (1989: 144): 'As a script system *ogam* is a *cul-de-sac*, sacrificing flexibility and compactness for some other reason: mystification, secrecy, or the convenience of incision'.

¹⁶ This conclusion is supported by Thomas (1994a: 68-85) observations, that on the non-Irish bilingual stones the Irish names are in *ogam* next to the Latin inscriptions for this reason.

development, would have had a more restricted audience than Latin. Ultimately, MacManus dismisses the view of *ogam* as a development outside of Christianity¹⁷.

Some of these conclusions are contrary to the findings of Thomas (1971: 94-96; 1994: 36), who investigated grave markers within the broader insular region. He believes that the script was probably non-Christian in origin. He sees it as being broadly analogous to the '*nomina, filiation formulae, and tribal names of Roman funerary inscriptions ... moreover the use of the deceased's name in the oblique case also occurs in pagan Roman epitaphs*'. Additionally, he notes that *ogam* might have been derived from the name of a Gaulish god *Ogmios*¹⁸. Thomas also asks in 'the selective use of geologically smoothed or squared pillars for *Oghams* do we sense the Roman shaped slab and tablet?' (1987: 8). The nature and form of the *ogam* medium is central to this thesis. Morris (1983: 30) has suggested of the British *ogam* 'the possibility that the stones represent an amalgamation of traditions, part native and part exotic'. A justification of this view is that it is not certain that all of the stones originated in a 'Christian milieu'. This hybrid use has been investigated by Ó Cróinín (1995: 35), who has suggested that while the British *ogam* show the formulae of late-Roman inscriptions, this trend was never imported back to Ireland; stating about the Irish *ogam*: 'they were erected by men whose living language was Irish and whose funerary practices (and language) must reflect the reality of Irish society in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries'. This again highlights the cultural and communication differences between Ireland and England at this time.

Notably, the use of *ogam* to record the names of dead people also seems out of character for the early Irish church, for whom the focus of Christianity was on joining the heavenly father rather than being on ancestors. Thomas (1971) thinks, from the non-Christian nature of remembering the dead and the use of pagan stones that *ogam* inscriptions were made for a non-Christian audience. Supporting this view, the use of *ogam* to provide support for land claims based on non-Christian ancestry was discussed earlier (Charles-Edwards 1976: 83-85). Hamlin (1982b: 285) disagrees that *ogam* are non-Christian based on this reasoning, associating the interest in ancestry as a Christian Irish characteristic and not a non-Christian interest. However, from the symbolism associated with the standing stone as an *axis mundi* it is unlikely that the inscriptions were not read as addressing the dead, even if within

¹⁷ 'It does seem a little forced, therefore, to argue that an innovation in Ireland dating in all probability to the late fourth or early fifth century, using an alphabet deriving ultimately from Latin and observing a custom found in contemporary Gaul and western Britain, could have been the brainchild of an isolated and backward-class which found the trappings of Roman culture distasteful if not offensive' (MacManus 1991: 60)

¹⁸ *Ogmios* is identified as a Gaulish version of Hercules who was closely associated in Gaul with Hermes – herald of the gods – and by association communication (MacManus 1991: 151). Ethnographically the creation of languages is often attributed to gods (Ong 1982: 33; 75, 93; Firmage 1993: 6-8). Both Gaul and Britain are believed to have been sources of cultural influence over Ireland at this time (Morris 1983: 31).

a Christian context. Both arguments for the origins of *ogam* are compelling and indicate that further research might shed new light on this area. For this study, there are a number of factors that are important. Firstly, that there was experimentation in communication with and to audiences. Secondly, that standing stones were used as the medium for these messages. Standing stones were thus being used for public communication using a visual-coded system, before the introduction of High Crosses. This suggests that the new form of communication, detailed in the preceding chapter, was the product of the early Church developing a pre-existing Irish media. In some ways, the audience would have already had some intertextual associations, of any stone, with (coded message) decorations. What other features of this non-Christian practice were continued will be detailed in the following discussion.

Thomas has linked the distribution of *ogam* to the distribution of primary cross-marked stones, which he defines as 'the earliest uninscribed Christian memorials':

One wonders whether there was not an unintentional geographical distinction, between the use of Christian *ogam* epitaphs in the south of Ireland and in those mainland Irish colonies derived mostly from the south and east of Ireland, on the one hand; and the use of primary stones in the north and west of Ireland and the northern (Manx and Scottish) Irish colonies on the other. Apart from rare and scattered instances, and very much later 'Pictish' *ogams* of the far north, *ogam*-inscribed stones are hardly found at all in the north (1971: 125).

He (1971: 125) suggests that they might be a 'rough index of missionary activities'. Thomas in a later study (1987: 9) sees the *ogam* tradition as a counter-point to the developing practice of inscribing slabs and freestanding stones with crosses:

In those parts of Ireland where *ogam* memorials are least common (that is, the north and extreme west) we encounter another and ultimately more important form: the uninscribed cross-ornament stone. Its genesis is as obscure as its chronology. There is no strictly exclusive distribution pattern (Thomas 1971). By the sixth century we should have *ogam*-inscribed stones that, like British memorials, exhibit simple crosses. Yet as Dr Ann Hamlin shows - and again we should be well past 500 - here and there the final *chi-rho* forms escaped literate settings and appeared, albeit in remote places, on their own (Hamlin 1972)...The by now irrelevant circle or ring around the *chi-rho*, in origin the Classical wreath or corona, also becomes a fossil. From Wales there is a simple ring and linear cross on the *ogam* and Latin stone of the Irish-descended king *Voteporix* (mid sixth century; Macalister 1945, no.358), and another nearer to 600 on a pillar from the island of Lundy (Thomas 1981, Fig. 21.7).

The adoption, distribution and range of ringed cross forms and their associated symbolism will be revisited in the next chapter.

INSCRIPTIONS: LATIN

The first Latin inscriptions in Ireland have been dated to the late fourth and early fifth centuries (Stevenson 1989: 168). There was a split between the eastern and western churches in their use of languages; the western church opting for Latin over Greek (Bethell 1981: 37-38). Therefore, although Egyptian and other eastern contacts are attested in the material record, the Irish church followed the Roman church in official language. The translation of the Bible, other religious writings, canon law, monastic rules and the lives of the saints into Latin are all believed to have been completed between AD 350 and 450. The *Collectio Canonum*, a collection of ecclesiastical and secular collection of laws from Munster, was compiled in the first half of the eighth century (Breatnach 1984: 456-459). However, Bäuml (1980: 238) believes that the Latin language itself had come to occupy, since the fourth century at the latest, an increasingly isolated position: it had become solely a literary language¹⁹. This very 'isolation' might have been an asset in Ireland where the desire to stand apart from society was part of the eremitic aspiration²⁰. Latin remained a dominant language in writing until the eighth to ninth centuries when it was replaced by the vernacular (Flower 1954: 88), although Stevenson (1989:162) has suggested a date as early as the seventh-century to account for the large volume of secular laws; this earlier chronology has also been suggested by Ó Corráin (1989:12-15).

However, as Bäuml correctly cautions us that the extent of literacy in the medieval period cannot be measured by the use of the Latin language:

The definition of literacy in the medieval period as the individual ability to read and write, in Latin, is valid enough in a limited sense, but it will not serve when the intention is to describe, implicitly or explicitly, the function of literacy in medieval society (Bäuml 1980: 239).

This is a very important consideration when discussing the Irish High Crosses and their decoration. Examples of mistakes made in the chronology or placement of scenes have already been discussed in the preceding chapters. The question of the comparative literacy of the artists, patrons and the

¹⁹ This is supported by Stock (1983: 23) who states that, 'Religious forces contributed to widening the gap between popular and literary Latin from within the Empire. Political forces often came from outside'.

²⁰ The effect of this is pointed out by Camille: 'Latin had an aura as it was separated from the baser speech acts of everyday existence in the complex rituals of a clerical group, whose monopoly was the manipulation of this metalanguage. Power was embodied in the very naming of objects, for, according to medieval epistemology, "*vox significans rem*"; there existed a real relationship between the sound of a word and its referent' (1985: 30).

audience needs to be investigated. This will help to separate figurative ornament from apperceived message – in terms of what was being ‘read’.

Bäumli (1980: 246) believes that there are three circumstances that must be understood when assessing the levels of literacy in a culture. The first of these is that there are three socially functional modes of approach in the transmission of knowledge: the fully literate; that of the individual that must rely on the literacy of another for access to written transmission; and that of the illiterate without need or means for such reliance. This tripartite division is echoed by Camille (1985)²¹, who has suggested a similar segmentation to Bäumli’s. It is interesting to apply this segmentation to what we know of early Irish society around the High Crosses. It would be tempting to assume that the coordinators of the decoration of ecclesiastical art were from the first group; that the second group were artists (which would explain some of the general errors in interpreting Bible stories) and that the third would have been some of those who saw the High Crosses (in combination with the first two groups). However, the discrepancy that we find in the coordination of Cross iconography does not entirely endorse this division.

The second of Bäumli’s circumstances, is that there are two types of transmission: oral and written. A subset of visual or pictorial communication should be added to this definition (although there are verbal and a verbal considerations to this). The use of images to communicate does not assume any particular learned skills, other than the ability to interpret images through a medium. This is especially the case with the High Crosses where the images are not in themselves complex scenes with hidden meaning, as might be argued for Gospel books, where a more extensive education was needed to understand the full scope of what was depicted²².

The third of Bäumli’s circumstances is the existence of a functional difference between the spoken and written word. It is likely that the introduction of literacy to communicate the Christian message to a largely illiterate culture led to the development of alternative methods of communication such as the Irish High Crosses panels. Galbraith (1935: 201) has stated that the level of illiteracy of a lay population is caused, ‘[by that] peculiar specialisation of function which divided the medieval world into those that fought, those who worked, and those that prayed’. As has been covered above, one of the most noticeable effects of the introduction of Christianity may have been a change to a more

²¹ ‘Although a multiplicity of levels must have existed between, on the one hand, the clerical *litteratus* and, on the other, the totally illiterate peasant, it may be useful to make a broader theoretical division into three main groups’ (Camille 1985: 32).

²² The nature of educational images compared to artistic images was discussed in the preceding chapter.

urban and centralised society. There are communication requirements that accompany changes in the centralisation of focus of society²³.

Exclusive users of oral discourse would by definition be anyone that was not independently capable of writing or reading or did not have access to a scribe. This means that monasteries were in a powerful position, as literacy became a valuable commodity in a changing society²⁴. Non-literates were found amongst 'lay' folk and nobles alike²⁵. In Britain, it has been suggested that the early Anglo-Saxon kings were completely illiterate and were able to manage without written documents of any kind, as their grants were made orally (Galbraith 1935: 202-203). But it is hard to imagine that the advantages of a literate society could be ignored, particularly in Ireland where the clergy became progressively involved in the recording, maintenance and recording of laws²⁶. The connection between the Irish canons and passages from biblical scenes has also been discussed above. This connection might have resulted in the need for iconographic libraries to illustrate some laws to those that did not speak Latin. This could be another contributing impetus for the development of the illustrated High Cross panels.

There is evidence that the transition to a literate society was neither a smooth or consistent process. The church was well placed to capitalise on this period of transition. By the time Charlemagne died in AD 814, he had reconstituted the Roman Empire to include France, the Low Countries, greater Germany and sectors of Italy and Spain and, 'ordinary people in different regions could scarcely any longer understood each other' (Stock 1983: 23). This would have put the Church in a powerful position in interregional contact and trade by offering a common language²⁷. It is believed that the Church performed all literary functions during this time (Galbraith 1935: 201). The initial use of writing in the early Christian period would have been exclusively for religious purposes but this would have changed once the benefits and opportunities represented by literacy were seen in secular

²³ Stock (1983: 14) says, 'Oral discourse, as a means of communicating and storing facts, was well suited to a society that was regionalised, highly particularised, and more conscious of inherited status than achievement though pragmatic social roles'.

²⁴ As discussed above, monasteries have been linked to the development of trade and use of literacy in Ireland has been linked increased trade between regions (Stevenson 1989: 138). Additionally, monastic developments have been linked to increased urbanism; and so is literacy (Ong 1982: 86).

²⁵ Non-literates were called *idiota* a Latin term borrowed from Greek (Stock 1983: 28). Bäuml calls them *illiterati* and states that they were 'not unacquainted with the content of the Bible and of written vernacular narrative; they are, however, functionally dependent on orally transmitted directives for the conduct of their lives. These orally transmitted directives for the daily life of the illiterate with no need for access to literacy in a literate society must, however, be distinguished from the oral tradition as it functioned in a preliterate society' (1980: 247).

²⁶ The Irish laws were compiled as one text in the first half of the eight-century (Beatnach 1984: 456-459; Doherty 1980: 71). The social implications of this have been discussed earlier.

²⁷ Ong (1982: 94) characterises the start of literacy as a trade of 'craft literacy'.

practice. This would have been one of the driving forces behind the growth of a vernacular language. The increased use of literacy changes a society to one that is both more 'learned' and popular in nature (Stock 1983: 23). For the majority of the lay folk, seeing an inscribed artefact of some sort and rare examples of script on the Irish High Crosses or standing stones would have been possibly their only exposure to the written word. Only a small part of the exposed audience would have been able to decypher the inscriptions²⁸. This would suggest that crosses had different audiences. Some of that audience would come from an oral tradition and were as a result more dependent on visual images.

We have some understanding of the structure of pre-Christian oral society in Ireland and how message dissemination occurred. A society based around an oral communication model is often found amongst isolated communities with a strong network of kinship and group solidarity (Stock 1983: 15-16)²⁹. This is an accurate description of Ireland even during the early Christian period. It is common for a written language to start as a restricted, secret and privileged knowledge (Ong 1982: 93; Vastokas 1994: 337). In either written or oral traditions, there are usually people that collect and control information; in Irish society, these were the *filid* and *seanchai*. There were also *ollamb* who were storytellers and could individually recount up to 250 stories (Mytum 1992: 54-56). These people were powerful because, in an oral culture one can ask something but not look it up (Stock 1983:15). The *ollamb* functioned as the community historian. The *filid* and *seanchai* had the roles that were later adopted by the Christian clergy and they emphasised the roles and ownerships of the aristocrats, by retelling myths, traditions that justified the status quo³⁰. As they were the sole repositories of this valuable knowledge, as such the law protected them³¹. The driving force behind the rapid adoption of Latin appears to have been the relationship between the clergy and the nobles. It is believed that the role of the *filid* continued after the introduction of Christianity. They primarily had literary, historical and legal responsibilities. One particular segment of the *filid* was the *brithemoin* ('judgement-makers') who acted as the king's repository of legal knowledge and were responsible for its interpretation (Binchy 1971: 152; Mytum 1992: 56).

²⁸ To part of the audience, the inscriptions might have seemed to be another image.

²⁹ 'Oral communications unite people in groups. Writing and reading are solitary activities that throw the psyche back on itself' (Ong 1982:69)

³⁰ The aggressive adoption of 'druidic' roles in relation to the *axis mundi* and society has been discussed above.

³¹ The role of the oral speaker expanded from verbally reinforcing the place of the elite in society to a broader one of recording the laws and administrative details of the aristocracy. 'Clearly the socio-political functions of the higher as well as the lower nobility increasingly required such access to the written transmission of knowledge from the ninth century onwards' (Bäumel 1980: 244).

These heralds and storytellers communicated with an audience that had no experience with other types of cultural communication³². The change from an oral culture to that of a literate one was not immediate. Mostly likely, the 'story teller' recited from memory in the vernacular. Gospel stories could have been taught from one Latin literate person to satellite storytellers. Learning Latin would not have come as easily to the Irish because they had not been exposed to Latin from Roman occupation. However, in terms of public proclamations, it is likely that this role remained centralised around heralds, storytellers and the clergy. In the interim, it is possible that transitional techniques of gesture and ritual would have been utilised in Ireland (Bethell 1981: 42-43)³³.

Clear differences exist between the oral and written transmission of knowledge. 'Oral exchange, if recorded, would have preserved many of its original features, for instance, formulae, repetition, and encyclopaedism. Written texts are continually being re-performed, offering continuities in human behaviour' (Stock 1983: 13). These differences have also been emphasised by Bäuml:

The differences between the oral tradition and literacy arise partly from the fact that the written text is fixed and exists independently of author and reader, whereas the oral performance is protean, ephemeral, and dependent for its existence on the performer, and partly they arise from the difference in the perceptual situation dictated by oral recitation and the written text (1980: 249).

The High Cross would have functioned as fixing the meaning and associations of certain stories, myths, associations and meanings in this capacity.

Literacy entered the oral legal system by imitating the already functioning verbal institutions. 'Unwritten law was made up of words, rituals, and symbols. In the place of the author's signature one had a sign, cross or simply a *manumissio*, a ceremonial placing of hands on the parchment' (Stock 1983: 47). There is evidence of the use of the cross as a signature in Britain (Galbraith 1935: 217). The purpose of this is to show that the illiterate participants (litigants) were witness to the document. It is possible that the use of the cross as signature in England in later medieval times was to indicate that the writer was making the precise sign of Jesus crucified (Clanchy 1979: 174). If we take the cross signature as signifying Christ, this shows another witness and not just a sign of affiliation³⁴. Camille (1985: 27) believes that the use of seals represents the, 'continued desire for the physical

³² 'In the middle ages the masses of the people read by means of the ear rather than the eye, by hearing others read or recite rather than by reading themselves' (Crosby 1936: 88).

³³ This would have had a functional benefit, as well as being entertaining, since use of ritual and rhythm is also thought to assist the storytellers ability to remember somatically (Ong 1982: 64-67)

³⁴ Another consideration, central to conversion to Christianity, is the significant rite within baptism of being marked with the sign of the cross.

token of bearing witness...’ This use of signatures would indicate from an early time that transactions had to be seen as well as heard³⁵.

EARLY CHURCH COMMUNICATION

The investigation so far has focused on the transition from an oral culture to a literate one, which in many ways mirrors the transition of a pre-Christian society to one of Christianity. This is of particular importance to the study of the decorated High Crosses because it deals directly with their role within the culture, as a medium of communication. The importance of this method of communication can be investigated by comparing the religious colonisation of Ireland with that of Britain.

Bethell (1981: 46) in a study of Augustine of Canterbury’s mission to convert the British people AD 597, under Gregory’s direction, believes that the mission was a failure. This was because he took with him Latin speakers and used non-nobles and slaves to spread the word of the Church. This differs dramatically from the Irish practice. It has been noted that Patrick started at the top of society with the nobles³⁶. The interesting characteristic of Patrick’s approach is that he did not translate the scriptures into the vernacular. This might have in part been to satisfy the ‘martyr’ complex of the early monasteries, in that they were further separated from the lay population. However, Irish monasticism is known for its missionary zeal. So why was the Irish church more successful than Augustine’s mission to England was? The answer lies partly perhaps in the way that the message was delivered.

The Irish High Crosses were designed to be publicly visible and, unlike other forms of standing stones, could be viewed from all sides. They have been described as ‘a veritable illustrated Bible’ (Westropp 1907: 290), ‘prayers written in stone’ (Flower 1954: 95) or ‘sermons in stone’ (Stalley 1996: 15). The crosses are unlikely to be simple historisation, i.e. direct translations of Bible events into images, for there are a large variety of panel scenes on Irish High Crosses. Some crosses show coordinated themes between panels, whereas others show a lack of comprehension of the subject matter with themes shown out of order. However, this perspective limits them to a passive role.

³⁵ Although strangely, as Link (1995: 64) points out, medieval art kings and nobles rarely are shown with their mouths open, lower classes and the devils are. This might in some way reflect the lack of need to speak, the use of oral traditions belonging in the pagan past and acting as a social delimiter between the pre-literate and literate periods. The use of pictorial means in signifying oral witness can also be seen on some of the iconographical panels that decorate the High Crosses where the hand of God - *manus dei* - is the scene at the top of the panel. ‘We should see [that] the aim of the artist in this period [is] to evoke the sound of the voice’ (Camille 1985: 28).

³⁶ Patrick in his *Confessio* states: ‘I kept giving rewards to Kings, besides which I kept giving a fee to their sons, who walk with me’ (trans. Howlett 1994:87)

Since the crosses both articulated and mediated social relations, they should be considered as active participants within their social context.

A few authors have directly discussed the crosses as 'teaching tools' but their part in the greater Christian arsenal for conversion has not been dealt with. Henry has stated that in 'the primitive establishments, in the hermitages, no more was needed than a pillar marked by a cross or a slab bearing a few symbolic ornaments to mark the tomb of a few ascetics and to sum up in a cryptic fashion the hope which governed their life ... monastic cities inhabited with hundreds of students will require more sumptuous ornament' (1965: 117). Henry is making assumptions about one tradition of standing stone fulfilling the exact role of another. This is hard to support in light of the current discussion. This study has indicated they should be seen as a system of communication – often complementary – but as a medium they are differentiated by their utility. However, this does not discount socio-economic considerations in their development and where we find them.

In the foundation of the early Irish church, Scherman (1981: 317) holds that 'the first requisite of education was the teaching of Scriptures, and what better place to proclaim the holy messages than great stone monuments accessible and comprehensible to all?' The High Crosses were apposite billboards, to educate a largely illiterate audience, where the weight of images was far more powerful than a foreign tongue. Alternatively, this view has been questioned by Stalley (1996: 42), who states that while the crosses would have been a way of exposing 'Christian truths' to a lay folk he cautions that some of the scenes appear too complicated for lay folk to comprehend. This view is supported by Veelenturf (1997), in a detailed study of the iconography of particular eschatological Christ scenes, who has reached several interesting conclusions regarding the nature of the decorations of the crosses that have led him to believe from their complexity that they are 'too sophisticated to be instructive to the illiterate'. He has reached this conclusion, in part, due to his identification that the complex iconographic themes gain their meaning from the reader having a comprehension of the combination of images. However, while his iconographic analysis is instructive, it does not account for the possibility for different levels of knowledge or for the role of a third party explaining the crosses. Part of the problem for any discussion in this area is our understanding of the interpreter is the different levels of consistency in High Cross decoration. It also does not fully explain the impetus for developing this form of communication. It is more likely that while some of the different levels of interpretation were restricted by the readers 'background books' that the iconography itself was adopted to cater for an oral culture. So while appearing complex to us we need to consider how the crosses were used, before assuming complexity was a barrier to how they were read, as shall be discussed in the next section.

Additionally, the fact that these scenes were static should be taken into account as repetition and focus would have aided in their comprehension. We also have to take into account who was to have been exposed to the crosses in monasteries, as was detailed in the preceding Chapter Four. It is not implausible that, as with illuminated manuscripts, some images were 'cryptic' in order to prompt meditation. Henry (1965: 135) believed that the figurative scenes added a didactic element that helped in their interpretation. Incorrect executions of iconographic themes cited above raise questions about whether the artists and patrons themselves were cognisant of the ecclesiastical meanings of their depictions whereas others appear complex and show a great degree of coordination.

Regardless, of the relative competence of the execution or direction of scenes, it is likely that the crosses had an established educational role. Perhaps our understanding of them is limited in that we read the crosses as individuals and not collectively as part of a group dynamic. It is possible we are putting too much weight on the role of the crosses as the only contributor to this communication process. Our appreciation of the crosses content might differ depending on how it was conveyed to us. The way in which the Church would have had to reach the people was through their imagination. Images are tools that are used to stimulate imagination and frames or contexts are used to focus the imagination on the image or object. In this case, we have the Irish High Cross and its environment as the context and the panels as the image. Napier (1992: xvii) believes that it is ritual that marks the connection of the object and the context: 'it is with ritual that objective images become contextualised and contexts become image making or imaginary'. However, we have very little documentary evidence for what ritual might have been associated with the Irish High Crosses.

MULTIMEDIA: THE HIGH CROSS AND RITUAL

Initially the province of the *filid* ritual might have included music and speech. The clergy may have used a similar environment for the telling of the tales and public announcements. An early Irish legal tract *Berrad Airechta* discussed the use and role of *ogam* in proving a hereditary claim to land. One of the passages has been translated as saying 'Inheritance has been secured by *ráth* sureties, has been engraved in *ogams*, has been pronounced solemnly by poets, has been earned by wealth, has been attested by periods of time' (746.37ff. trans. McManus 1991: 164, my emphasis). In discussing this passage, Plummer (1923: 390) states that 'it would seem therefore that family poets were expected to make mnemonic verses related to the family lands, which might be cited as evidence'. This would have been based around the inscriptions of the dead persons name on standing stones. If this view is correct, it is not such a leap to expect that High Crosses would have followed this tradition with

public recitations based on the depictions³⁷. It is worth repeating the distinction that the more developed High Crosses are differentiated from other standing stones in that their content was displayed on four faces facilitating a larger audience³⁸.

What is not clear is the form of these public recitations. An example of an oral recitation from this time can be found in *Beowulf* where the *scop* of Hrothgar entertains the banqueters by chanting the famous tale of the feud between Finn and Hengest. There are two main methods of oral recitation: reciting or chanting to the accompaniment of a musical instrument and reading aloud (Crosby 1936: 89-90). Musical instruments may have been used in accompaniment of a speaker to interpret the panels of an Irish High Cross. The use of music would reinforce the sense of drama. Bethell (1981: 43) reminds us that it is important to 'remember that we are dealing with the teaching of a pre-industrial, pre-literate, story-telling culture, where, let us also remember, people liked stories to be dramatic, marvellous, mythical and symbolic'.

It might be possible to find evidence of this connection with ritual and music on the Irish High Crosses. The iconography and morphology of the 'Cross of Scriptures' might indicate a musical purpose. The 'Cross of Scriptures' has four medallions that are in front of the ring (see Fig. 185). This arrangement is similar to the front piece of the Canon Tables of the *Gospels of Rossano* (Underwood 1950: Fig. 57). The front piece of the Gospel is a circular wreath that has four circular disks with the evangelists inside see Fig. 186. This is also the only ringed cross in Ireland that has the ring over the transom, a feature that emphasises the medallions and their placement (compare Data 49 to 21-50). Harbison (1992: 52) recognises that these have been identified as the evangelists but thinks this is unlikely. However, Werner (1987) has demonstrated that the evangelist symbols took a wide variety of unconventional forms in early Christian art. The variety of forms of evangelist symbols found in insular manuscripts has been investigated by Cronin (1994), who suggests that these images 'could be read on a number of levels'³⁹. If we accept that these were evangelists, the

³⁷ It should be recalled that much of the ritual and roles of the clergy in the Eucharistic liturgy are re-enactments and performance of ritual passed through the order of the Last Supper. Another Irish ritual, that appears to have been established, were the accounts of Saints Patrick and Brigit in delimiting land boundaries in a ritual similar to that of Constantine should be recalled (discussed in Chapter 3 and 5).

³⁸ How the audience interacted with the crosses is unknown. However, if considered as a group, there is some evidence to suggest that they did move around the cross. Investigations of the inscriptions of the Cross of Scriptures, at Clonmacnois, have discovered that the east face inscription follows the west inscription as a continuation (Ó Murchadha 1980; Henry 1980: 38). In order to read this message the reader or audience had to move around the cross.

³⁹ In many cases they are identified as evangelists by there being four figures or 'zoa' and their positioning around Christ. In discussing the depiction of evangelists on Northumbrian crosses, Cramp (1978: 126) has suggested that the different placement of the figures on the head or shaft 'may have a different theological significance'.

layout of this scene has implications within the context of the High Crosses and music. Underwood in discussing the medallions and Evangelists of the *Rossano* front piece states that 'musical harmony is sometimes attributed to the Evangelists in inscriptions, mostly in verse, that accompany their representations, and in literary sources, chiefly poetry...that may possibly attribute a musical harmony to the Evangelists' (1950: 119)⁴⁰. He also notes that in the *Lindisfarne Gospels* that the angel and lion of Matthew and Mark are depicted blowing horns⁴¹. These images might have been cues for hymn or music recitation when the crosses were read. Other iconographic scenes may have had music associated with them. A common theme found on the High Crosses that involves David is as a court musician and poet, presumably where he assists Saul with a sore tooth by playing music (1 Samuel 16: 14-23), for example on the left arm of the west face of the North Cross Castledermot, (Fig. 44) (for more depictions see Data 128, 139). Other forms of David as musician on Irish slabs are discussed in detail by Roe (1949: 54-58), Harbison (1992: 213-214) and Veelenturf (1997: 117); scenes are also found on Pictish slabs, discussed by Henderson (1986: 91-92).

The combination of narration and rites were often used to consecrate the centre with signs of the sacred. This might have involved several elements: 'holy places and sacred objects, epochs and feasts, are other aspects of the contingency that we find in narration' (Ricoeur 1967: 169). Sacred objects were often mobile, in the form of icons, pocket books and other objects and artefacts that represented the cult of relics. The other form, as has been suggested in this study, is the more stationary class of artefacts. A feature of the latter class of artefacts is that they are by nature open to the public whereas mobile artefacts may have restricted access.

Christian portable artefacts would have been used to reinforce the attention of the audience in learning the message of the Church; examples of these were the icons and other religious depictions that made their way to Ireland from the East. These would have served as a focus for both private

⁴⁰ Underwood (1950:122-123) notes that there is an inscription at Paulinus' Church that describes the Evangelists as 'sonorous springs'. Furthermore, on an inscription (twelfth century) in San Marco in Venice that, 'Not only do the Evangelists again have a close relation to Ecclesia – her guardians – but they produce sweet sounds as they move the spheres'. With other examples he speculates: 'when one reflects that throughout the earlier Christian era the four Evangelists had been frequently conceived as musicians whose harmony, like that of the rivers of Paradise and the four seasons, pervades the whole world, one wonders whether their association with the cosmic harmony had not occurred long before the twelfth century'. Following his description an example from Irish literature of the period can be identified, from the tenth century *Book of Lecan, The Adventure of St Columba's Clerics* (trans. Stokes 1894a: 145), is a description of the throne of God uses similar imagery: 'Thus, then, is that throne: like a canopied chair with four columns of precious stone beneath it. Yea, though one should have no rapture save the harmonious singing together of those four columns, it were enough to him of glory and delight'.

⁴¹ An alternative interpretation of trumpets in High Cross iconography has been forwarded by Veelenturf (1997: 166), who believes in the context of 'Last Judgement' scenes, that trumpets are sounded to raise the dead – which does not necessarily imply a harmonious sound.

and public meditation. The appeal of such images demonstrated the strength of the cult of the saints in both Ireland and Europe. Lucas (1986) has discussed different public and private uses of relics in Ireland in detail. The High Crosses might have functioned as a multi-paged icon⁴².

THE PLACEMENT OF INSCRIPTIONS ON HIGH CROSSES

If we accept an 'interpreter' of some description was employed, to publicly read the High Crosses, a question remains about what content was read. Few of the Irish High Crosses have inscriptions, which might lead us to assume that some viewers of these crosses were literate and were able to decode their meaning. Initially, a lay audience may not have been able to distinguish between an iconographical image, geometric pattern or a script. They would all appear alien to an untrained eye. Galbraith (1935: 207) states that the 'written word had no intelligible meaning ... they must have acquired an almost magical force...'⁴³.

We have an example of an attempt to teach the Latin language in a public forum on the Alphabet Stone at Kilmalkedar, Co. Kerry (Cuppige 1986, Fig. 184 No. 2), dated to the second half of the sixth century. This is 1.22m high and has half-uncial Latin script down one side. Since this is the only example of this type in Ireland and it is relatively early, compared to the High Crosses, it might represent a failed attempt to teach Latin. This may have been discarded in favour of pictorial communication. O'Meadhra (1987b: 99) has pointed to the presence of further 'alphabet stones': the Latin alphabet on slates and reused stone axe heads. The use of waxed tablets or other less durable materials is also plausible. This still indicates that Latin had a more restricted practice. Ó Cróinín has discussed the issues involved with the teaching of Latin in Ireland in detail (1995: 174-181).

Epigraphic evidence has been used to establish some form of relative chronology for the High crosses, through the associations of names found on crosses and those surviving in legal texts. They have been used to date the Clonmacnois Cross of the Scriptures to AD 915 and the Durrow Cross to AD 1010 (Ó Ríordáin 1942: 144), although it is difficult to be certain that names were inscribed at the time the cross was constructed (Ó Murchadhas 1988:65). Harbison (1999: 45) has used more recent epigraphic findings as evidence of the royal patronage of some Clonmacnois High Crosses;

⁴² This is a view also suggested by Harbison (1992: 353) who has proposed that the High Crosses might be enlarged versions of altar or processional crosses that were used to enhance the discussion of scriptures.

⁴³ McNally (1969: 10) believes that the letters of the alphabet and manuscripts took on 'mystical' and 'curative' values. This is supported by Stock (1983: 31) who stated that: 'books, too, when introduced by missionaries, were seen as embodiments of divine power, in which interwoven text and decoration achieved symbolic status'. In later medieval texts, *ogam* was believed to possess magical associations (Stevenson 1989: 148).

linking Maelsechnaill I two important High Crosses dating between 846 and 862 AD: the Cross at Castlebernard, Co. Offaly and the South Cross at Clonmacnois, Co. Offaly. The High Cross at Kinnity, Co. Offaly has been also linked Maelsechnaill I (De Paor 1987) a king of the Clann Cholmáin branch: 846-862A.D. Additionally, the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnois, Co. Offaly has been linked to high King Flann Sina: 879-916 A.D. (Harbison 1999: 45). The High Cross at Bealin, Co. Westmeath with an inscription has been dated to the early ninth century (Harbison 1992:26-28)⁴⁴.

A survey of the inscriptions by Higgitt (1986) has shown that the use and location of inscriptions can tell us a lot about the patrons, artisans and audience of the crosses. He has completed a comprehensive survey on Irish and British non-*ogam* inscriptions. All Irish High Crosses that have inscriptions have them on their bases. These were 'placed so low that the most convenient way to read them is on one's knees. The intended readership was surely human rather than divine in this instance' (Higgitt 1986: 127). Their placement would have also reinforced the liturgical position. Higgitt believes that the placement of the inscriptions at this location 'looks like a deliberate expression of humility' (1986: 129). He points out that the bases of crosses rarely bear Christian iconography, suggesting that the base represented the secular world. A more cynical appraisal of the positioning of the inscriptions at the base of the crosses would have been for self-promotion. It is the most logical place to gain recognition for the creation of the monument, the bases being the easiest place to read an inscription on a cross. This view might be backed by the fact that most of the inscriptions are in Irish (Higgitt 1986: 128), which would make the reading of the inscriptions accessible to a wider audience⁴⁵. The practice of inscribing in Latin, such as on the Kells cross, was short-lived (Henry 1967: 138).

The most common form of the crosses inscriptions are '*oróit do x*' or '*oróit ar x*' (prayer for x who caused this to be made) (Henry 1965: 135; Higgitt 1986: 128). Bealin, Monasterboice and the Tuam Cathedral fragments and perhaps also Clonmacnois, Iniscealtra and the Tuam Market Cross ask for

⁴⁴ Harbison's linking the inscriptions found on these crosses to a broader tradition of 'royal patronage' also found in England is unconvincing. He believes that the High Cross inscriptions are related to those found later on Irish metalwork after 1000A.D. However, considering the lack of inscriptions in general on High Crosses, especially when compared to England, this might suggest a convergent practice rather than a continuation. It is unclear whom the inscriptions were for the benefit of, assuming the royal patrons could read them and what significance they would have had to a lay audience. The need for the declaration itself – since they are on a minority of crosses – does not appear to have been a widespread practice. Additionally, the affiliations of royal families and these monasteries would have been self-evident without the need for inscriptions – however; they might have served to reinforce a kin-group's hold over, or royal affiliation with, a monastery where they were more literate.

⁴⁵ The sponsorship of crosses by patrons was discussed in Chapter Four.

prayers for those who commissioned the crosses (Higgitt 1986: 128-129). Higgitt interprets this as meaning that the inscriptions are more votive than memorial in nature⁴⁶.

An examination of the differences in inscriptions between Irish and Anglo-Saxon crosses can help shed light on the regional differences between the traditions⁴⁷. Anglo-Saxon crosses share little, in terms of the application and location of their inscriptions, with Irish crosses. Inscriptions are both more complex and numerous. Significantly, they are rarely found on the base of the cross, which Higgitt believes might indicate different devotional practices (1986: 130). In fifteen Anglo-Saxon examples, the inscriptions are found on the crosshead. There is also a greater variation of languages: sixteen inscriptions are in Latin; seventeen are in Old English; and fifteen are in uncertain language or are just names. Some crosses, like the Ruthwell cross, were bilingual with a division in the use of the languages; Latin is used for religious purposes and vernacular being used for secular matters. There would also appear to be a greater variety of the inscription types, they are 'for prayers'; memorial crosses raised by the patron in his own memory; 'the cross is offered to God as a visible prayer'; 'commemorates and patrons are named quite frequently'; a maker, presumably the craftsman, is named on three crosses, and three crosses were from non-monastic contexts (Higgitt 1986: 129-133). The English and Welsh cross inscriptions indicate that these crosses act as memorials to the dead (Higgitt 1986: 144).

It is important not to limit the role of a cross to one purpose because of the presence of an inscription. This thesis has demonstrated that a cross could have had several meanings based on: form, context of use and decoration. If we were from an outside culture and looked at our own wartime monuments, it might be natural to assume that the roles of the Rotary and Lion Clubs medallions are pivotal to the meaning of the monument. In fact, they are allowed space at monuments because they help raise funds while the actual subject of the monument is often entirely different and a loosely related devotion. In this fashion, patrons might have been allocated a panel for their sponsorship. This is not necessarily placement based on humility. One of the features of Christianity is that God is omnipresent, so that the location of decorations is hardly likely to make a difference; its placement was for entirely secular reasons.

⁴⁶ There are also inscriptions such as on a Tuam Cathedral fragment where 'one of those named on the Tuam Cathedral fragment is called a craftsman and so too, possibly, was a named individual *Delgany*' (Higgitt 1986: 129). Others such as the Kells Tower Cross show relations with Saints Patrick and Columba. From the epigraphic evidence discussed above the 'royal' crosses follow the formula of 'prayer for the king of Ireland' (Harbison 1999:44)

⁴⁷ Regional differences in cross usage are important because they support the case for innovation and originality of both Irish and English cross traditions – they were tailored for specific and local uses.

Who 'commissioned' the inscriptions is still difficult to determine, it may not have been the same person who commissioned the cross. Some later crosses have examples of later generations inscribing their claim to a local cross and there is no way to know when this has occurred. The problem is further compounded by the use of generic names, which are not chronologically unique when compared to legal texts of the time. The 'ownership' of a cross might have conceivably been shared between different parts of the community⁴⁸. Higgitt (1986: 126) claims, 'It is not usually so clear who is speaking through the medium of the inscriptions, except that it is in a general sense the "patron", whether corporate, for example a monastery, or individual'. If Harbison's (1999) epigraphic identification of the direct royal patronage of certain Clonmacnois High Crosses is correct, this might indicate that they could have been the result of regal patronage alone. Although, considering the close kin links between kings and monasteries, a cross could be representative of a family: jointly representing spiritual and secular leadership.

The most important point for this study comes from a comparison of the placement and nature of the inscriptions in the two regions: there are some nine English examples where the inscriptions act to help interpret the figural scenes (Higgitt 1986: 136). In comparison, any survey of the iconography of the crosses shows that some of the panels are so similar that several possible meanings can be assigned (Harbison 1992). As Shanteau says, discussing the interaction of verbal and visual information: 'while it has become a cliché to say that one picture is worth a thousand words, it is also the case that one word can completely change the impact or meaning of a picture' (1983: 155)⁴⁹.

English crosses have their inscriptions mainly on the head, arms and shaft and the text in vertical and horizontal placement (Higgitt 1986: 130). One of the eight non-base inscriptions in Ireland is on the Fahan Mura slab (Fig. 10) where the inscription is placed on the cloaks of the figures (Harbison 1986:

⁴⁸ The community ownership of Irish mills has been discussed above. Another consideration is that our concept of 'ownership' or title is very personal. From an early Irish social perspective, the leader of a kin-group was often seen as representing the community. This has been discussed above in terms of the king as metaphor for his people. Another example of the leader standing for his people can be seen in oath taking. At a kin level a solemn oral declaration, an *audacht*, by the head of a kin-group with the consent of his kin could obligate the whole community (Charles-Edwards 1984:171). In this way, naming only a leader might be more representative of the whole than as a personal dedication. For example, In Tírechán's, *Account of St Patrick's Journey*, he tells the account of an Énde who 'said: "I give my son and part of my inheritance to Patrick's God and to Patrick"' (trans. de Paor 1993:158). Tírechán, a descendent of Énde, comments this is why 'we are servants of Patrick today'.

⁴⁹ Roland Barthes (1964) in discussing the nature of photography introduces the descriptor of 'anchorage' to describe words that are associated directly with visual images. Viewing visual images as polysemous he sees the words as helping to 'fix' the 'uncertain signs' that are present – anchoring how they are read – and perhaps indicating an differentiating Irish approach to interpretation.

59; Higgitt 1986: 131)⁵⁰. The Fahan Mura inscriptions are of great importance because would be one of the few examples in Ireland where figural depictions are directly related to inscription. This is a more common feature on Anglo-Saxon crosses. Another consideration is that although inscriptions on Irish Crosses are rare, if we accept that the crosses were painted, as has been mentioned above, there is no reason for inscriptions not to be painted onto crosses as well (Ó Murchadha 1980: 47-51). Unfortunately, this is something that cannot be proven at this point.

Higgitt (1986: 136) has suggested that some of the panels found on English crosses might have been left blank so that explanations could be painted on. The inscriptions show that 'some' of the audience was attempting (needed guidance) to read the crosses. This would limit the possibility that these scenes were placed on the standing stones to act in a talismanic fashion or as apotropaic forces. There are no examples on Irish High Crosses. If we assume that the audience was literate enough to read an inscription, that explained the panel, the Church would lose some control over the interpretation, although it could be argued that it might have been a deliberate act to encourage unlimited meaning by constructing an image without text. However, the very extent of this 'unlimited meaning' would have been curtailed by the artistic stereotypes of an iconography based on formal visual elements e.g. a mother with child is the Virgin Mary; or a man and a woman with a tree are Adam and Eve.

This might lead us to two conclusions. That these differences reflect the role of the sponsor; or that English crosses have a much wider audience that was more literate. Possibly, this might be because the inscribed English crosses were later in date or because literacy, following Roman occupation, was established earlier. Whatever the reason, it is significant that the Irish High Crosses do not have literary aids that we know of. Because inscriptions are rare in Ireland, this may mean that the audience were either: uninterested in the meaning of the depictions, which had a symbolic or semi-magical role or were able to understand the images without the use of a written guide – visually they formed a narrative language that complemented an oral culture; or that a more learned interpreter was used.

⁵⁰ Henry (1965: 126) who was unable to find it doubted the existence of this inscription, although subsequently identified.

EARLY CHRISTIAN VISUAL COMMUNICATION AIDES

The Irish method of communicating on High Crosses through decoration appears to have been almost entirely based on iconic and aniconic depictions. Later Gilbert Crispen, Abbot of Westminster (1085-1117), in his disputation between a Christian and a Jew states, “Just as letters are shapes and symbols of spoken words, pictures exist as representations and symbols of writing”... images were the “letters of the laity” (*litteratura laicorum*) ... embodied in Canon Law [in the twelfth century]’ (cited and trans. Camille 1985: 32). This indicates that in the twelfth century the church accepted the use of images to communicate formally with the laity as an alternative/substitute for a written language. On the other hand, Raw (1990: 3) believes that medieval art did not educate the illiterate but was a source of meditation (focus). The role of the decoration of the Irish High Crosses may be clarified by examining this distinction.

Before examining the use of pictorial representations as text on standing stones, we must first examine the way that pictures are used in conjunction with text in Ireland. The omission of text from pictorial scenes on High Crosses was not a characteristic of the Gospel books, which were often highly decorated. It has been suggested that the decoration of the High Crosses owe a lot to the artistic traditions of the major Gospel books such as the *Book of Kells* and the *Book of Durrow* and that the different designs for the Irish High Crosses were based on copybooks. The copybooks, in turn, might have been based on the gospel books.

It is important to understand that any pictorial representation at this time would have had social and religious connotations. Geary (1994: 165) believes that pictures ‘were far more than simple artistic representations painted by human artists and intended to inspire the faithful or to educate the illiterate. Like the holy men, they enjoyed a special relationship with divine. Often they were supposed not to have been painted by human hands but to have fallen from the heavens’. This view is supported by Kitzinger, who suggested that images and words were treated as ornament at this time⁵¹. Geary also says that images ‘participated directly in the existence and being of the person they represented, so that the image brought the pilgrim into direct visual (that is to say, in the traditional understanding of optics, tactile) contact with the person represented. To be in their presence was to look through a window into the other world and, correspondingly, to be seen by the person in the other world’ (1994: 165). While Geary’s interpretation is debatable, he does make a very important

⁵¹ ‘In the North, however, a page need not necessarily contain writing, or an illustration pertaining to the text, in order to justify its presence. A manuscript is an object suitable for pure decoration, like a knife or brooch. Ornament represents every thing that is rich and splendid and beautiful, and where the artist associates it with Holy Scripture it is his own way of paying a tribute to the glory of God’ (Kitzinger 1940: 38).

distinction that the images themselves might have different interpretations and functions to different audiences. However, it is unlikely that the majority of the pictorial illustration would have been accessible to the public since the High Crosses were likely the first figurative art that many of the lay population might have seen⁵².

Within the Gospels books, the relationship between image and text is often literally intertwined. Initials could be decorative initials or metaphorical images, or both. Is there any evidence that images came from a tradition where they augmented the transmission of knowledge or learning? It should be kept in mind that the easy dissemination of information was in the best interests of the Irish church. A consideration is that to a mind that is unconditioned to the phonetic values of written script, it is much easier to learn symbolic languages first (Napier 1992: xix). While Ireland never had a fully developed system of pictographs, the use of symbolic forms in public sculpture was a step in this direction. It is possible that common depictions functioned as logograms - the signs are basically pictures of objects, people, etc., but function variously as representations of words as wholes.

The development of visual images might have had uses that are more functional. Camille (1985: 28) believes that 'The separation of visual writing from its verbal meaning has implications for the decorated initials in the period which really served as a supportive framework for the reader, being clues for starting and stopping'. The illuminator would place appropriate images in order to indicate the appropriate places for meditation (Ong 1982: 86, 119). The more 'pagan' images might have been used as entertainment for those who were reading (Camille 1985: 37). Schapiro (1973: 9) states that images in the medieval period were used as 'pictorial titles', as introductions to passages⁵³. A similar view is proposed by Heslop (1986), who has suggested that the illuminated capitals of later manuscripts were summaries or graphical representations of the adjacent text.

It is also possible that these images had more established formal interpretive purposes. Illuminated initials have also been described as 'stemposts to the text' where they acted as formal links to the texts (Holländer 1974: 15). Nordenfalk (cited in Camille 1985: 28) has compared the structure of

⁵² It is unlikely that non-Christian art could have competed directly with Christian and secular patronage of the new forms. 'Barbaric art had no future. Its death was hastened by the inescapable fact that it could tell no story. And Christianity demanded that very thing, which classical, representational art alone could give it' (Durant 1960: 137).

⁵³ The use of narrative pictures was accepted only hesitantly into the art of the early medieval period. Images were justified either by the law of the narrative or by a book that justified the narrative (Belting 1990: 12). The preceding chapter discussed the innovative use of the panel to assist in the independent reading of narrative elements that were central to the Christian teachings.

book illuminations to musical notes, viewing them as tools for music. He believes that the symbols act as annotation for chanting and as a mnemonic trigger used to regulate the performance of the liturgy. Yates (1966) details examples of 'mnemotechnical' devices that are present in later medieval art used to assist memory⁵⁴. There is some evidence that mnemotechnical devices were used in Irish Law texts to assist in recalling details (Plummer 1923: 390; Binchy 1971: 153).⁵⁵

The use of such techniques, if present on the Irish High Crosses would have been a powerful and persuasive education mechanism. Camille (1985: 35) points out that, 'for a less literate audience, unable to manipulate "the word" but still be able to recognise it and moreover memorise its images, the minimal schema is vitally necessary. Its radical simplification makes the transmission of meaning easier, both for the onlooker and for the next artist who will copy it'. It would be a tempting proposition to see the High Crosses as a teaching mechanism that used distilled 'sets' of images in combination with the indigenous musical/oral traditions to teach the scriptures to the lay population.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on the development of the High Cross as a communication device in relation to its audience. The combination of technical features, discussed in Chapter Six, and this investigation from the perspective of the audience indicates that they were tailored devices to reach a characteristic Irish audience of this time. It is likely that the evolution of these features evolved alongside the developing needs of its audience.

The early Irish clergy were experimenting with other areas of communication aside from the development of the High Cross. To what extent this experimentation of the crosses was collaborative or centralised is uncertain. The uniformity of crosses and symbolic morphologies, regardless of the quality or competence of their execution, presupposes that there was some level of coordination. This might have been along the lines of the *Fenius Forrsaid* School but there is no evidence to support this. It is tempting to assume that Patrick and the early church learnt from experiences of the Church in converting peoples on the continent. Patrick's model of targeting the socio-political hierarchy might reflect this. However, by not translating the Gospels into the vernacular the Church

⁵⁴ In more modern studies of visual recall, the use of a visual mnemonics can act as an involuntary device for recalling information such as the brand names of products (Shanteau 1983: 156).

⁵⁵ Ong (1982:124), who sees the use of alphabetic indexes and pictorial content as aiding memory and recall, also supports this view.

had to develop other means of communicating the Gospels, which are at the core of Christian teaching.

It is important to recognise, as this study illustrates, that the use of a freestanding stones, with a coded message - such as *ogam* - did not necessarily originate as a Christian tradition. Even if we accept *ogam* was created under a Christian sphere of influence, this does not necessarily mean that it was always used in a Christian context. Furthermore, its utility, like Latin, might have been adopted for other purposes. This is not to say that the Christian church did not bring with it to Ireland the use of stones for specific purposes, such as recumbent slabs for burials. However, standing stones were already in use as a medium before their use by Christianity. While it appears the inspiration of the High Cross form was derived from other sources the communications model was a development upon an existing one.

While the language of the Christian church was Latin there appears to be limited evidence linking it directly to standing stones. Latin appears to have been restricted to the clergy at this time. The preceding discussion on the hermetic monastic spirit indicates that keeping the languages separate might have heightened this sense of separation from non-Christian populations. Alternatively, the emulation and replacement of the roles of Druids and poets in the areas of laws and traditions might have meant that the church deliberately wanted to restrict access and learning of Latin to strengthen their own value and importance. However, as the influence and nature of monasticism developed and Irish society restructured gradually towards a more urban nature this would have presented new communication challenges with the wider population being unfamiliar with Latin.

The primary difficulty in communicating the Christian message was that the majority of the population was illiterate and Christianity is taught through books. This mean that the were four main challenges: Firstly, they could not read the gospels in their original form; secondly, since they were coming from an oral tradition, which the previous chapter has indicated, complex messages had to be structured a different way for them – they couldn't just be translated; thirdly, how was this to be achieved in a public and accessible way? ; And fourthly, what would be the best format/ medium to present this information on? It is worth recalling that there is no indication that the first High Crosses were meant to be figuratively illustrated and this was a development that occurred later. A view proposed by this thesis is that because the largely iconic nature of the depictions and the lack of Latin or vernacular inscriptions that the audience for the High Crosses consisted of illiterate members. The use of a new narrative technique, in the form of panels framing pictorial narrative scenes, might indicate attempts to compose biblical teachings in away that an audience from an oral

tradition could relate to. The use of the cross as an *axis mundi* would have been a familiar context for religious, social and political gatherings. These developments appeared to have been tailored to satisfy the challenges for the early church in communicating to an Irish audience. They appear the result of 'feedback' from within the transmission communication systems model adopted for this study.

It is unlikely, that while the more developed crosses are capable of being read independently, that they were not exclusively meant to be. The High Crosses appear to be tools that were developed in every way to educate a congregation. The early church assumed many of the cultural roles that the druids and non-Christian poets performed. It is not unreasonable to assume that, as in later churches, they were responsible for verbally communicating the scenes on the crosses. This might have involved various rites, gestures, story telling and the use of song, hymns and music. Comparing the Irish crosses to English crosses, which do not annotate scenes with words to guide interpretation, appears to support this role for the Irish clergy. This is not to suggest that English crosses could have been used in a similar fashion.

It is important to differentiate that the crosses were capable of communicating more than one message. While the iconic panels can be seen as focused at a particular type of audience this does not mean all of the content of these panels were educational in nature. The limited use of Latin and vernacular scripts on the crosses indicates that panels were used for both spiritual and secular purposes. The use of inscriptions with a secular purpose appears to recognised the patrons that might have sponsored the construction of the crosses. It is also worth recalling the other orientation, social, legal, political and economic uses of the crosses and their decoration discussed in Chapter Five in this context. Additionally, the IHCPS indicates that there is a wealth of iconic and aniconic depictions that have not yet been decoded that might be relevant.

This concludes the examination of the High Crosses from an Irish perspective. The initial chapters of this study have investigated the High Cross as an artefact and the symbolic inspiration of its form. The follow chapters have investigated the artists and patrons, the context that the crosses were developed in, the uses of the crosses as well as identifying the likely audiences of the crosses. This investigation of the audiences was divided into an examination of the communication developments in terms of technical changes and adaptations followed by a discussion of the needs of interpretation. The following chapter shall attempt to examine how and why these different elements were combined to explain why build and develop the unique High Cross form.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE EASTERN ASPIRATION

The previous two chapters have sought to identify and explore the characteristics that define and motivate the tailoring of the High Cross as a communication medium. This has been achieved by examining the medium, intentions of the creators, the context, nature of the message and its transmission as well as the requirements and 'feedback' of the audience in this communication system. This investigation shows that it appears likely that the High Crosses were multifunctional on a socio-semiotic level, as polyvalent message vehicles in the eyes of a Christian and possibly a non-Christian audience, with spiritual and secular content. An important identification is that a primary driver behind the evolution of the class of High Crosses, in terms of their monumental size, was the need to display visual communication. This investigation of the communication development of the cross as a medium has indicated that this consideration, of larger display requirements, does not appear directly influence the evolution of the resulting cross morphology - accepting the cross form, as a symbol, was a contextual frame for interpretation - leaving the fundamental question of its original form unanswered. The development of the unique expression of the ringed crosshead, as part of a composite form, appears to be influenced by unrelated factors to those driving its development as a medium. The impetus of this development as with other aspects of the early Christian culture can be perceived as a unique response to foreign influences. As this study has indicated, there are many links in Irish culture and art with the east. This chapter will focus on the nature of these links and the influence they had on the development of the Irish High Crosses' form.

It has been demonstrated that Irish culture did not develop in isolation but also was not exclusively or excessively influenced from the east or the continent. A brief survey of interregional contact assists in assessing the extent and nature of the influences on Ireland at this time; while acknowledging it is also possible to see a wide range of autonomy, innovation and unique expression in early Irish Christian culture. However, this study has indicated that on several levels Irish culture was influenced by external symbolism, technology and socio-cultural considerations. An understanding of this establishes a context for differentiating local and non-Irish meanings and associations. This distinction will allow the question of why the High Cross was built, not just in functional terms as a medium, but the expression of the medium as a monumental ringed cross and how this interacted as an actor within the broader socio-cultural discourse.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON THE EARLY IRISH CHURCH

Historically, between the sixth and ninth centuries momentous changes occurred in Europe and in the East. By A.D. 600, Justinian's attempt to restore the empire with the west was long over. 'Nearly a century before its conquest by Islam, Christian Africa, for so long the leading church of the West, falls silent; Italy is absorbed in ceaseless conflict between the Lombard and Byzantine; France sinks into decadence' (Hillgarth 1962: 168). There was the iconoclastic controversy in Byzantium, AD 725-843 (Badawy 1978: 362) and the ninth century saw a split between the churches in the East and West (Walter 1993: 14). It is in this environment that we see the increased traffic and trade driven by the newly established churches of northwest Europe. We find in Ireland eastern artefacts, motifs, artwork and ideas from Europe that has been influenced by eastern art.

The early medieval period also saw increased trade and contact both between Ireland and its immediate neighbours as well as internally (Neuman de Vegvar 1987: 23-27; Mytum 1992: 54). The increase in trade coincides with the spread and demands of Christianity (Doherty 1980: 77) (see Map 18)¹. Ireland might have been trading with Rome as early as the fourth century (de Paor 1993: 38) and trade with the Mediterranean Gaul was occurring in the late fifth and mid-sixth centuries (Fulford 1989: 3). Early Christian Ireland is believed to have been in regular contact with Rome and various part of continental Europe (Ó Cróinín 1991). Textiles and icons may have come along the Mediterranean and also from the western seaboard or through Mediterranean Gaul (Neuman de Vegvar 1987: 23-27; Mytum 1992: 79). Metalwork from the Aquitanian region of France may have travelled the same routes as E ware pottery (Thomas 1976: 250)². Ireland also received techniques and motifs from Merovingian sources (Mytum 1992: 220). Additionally, Spain has been identified as a source of eastern and Coptic art and ideas at this time (Hillgarth 1961; 1962; 1984; MacLean 1986: 179) but contact between Ireland and Spain has been seen as debatable because of the lack of any clear evidence (Wooding 1996: 105). However, there is some evidence of eastern material finding its way to Ireland that might suggest direct trade. The main trade routes with Byzantium are thought to have been re-established in the sixth and seventh centuries (Lewis 1951: 43; Hillgarth 1962: 176; Thomas 1987: 9). Fulford (1989: 1-5) claims pottery from Syria, Asia Minor and Africa that has been found in Ireland and Britain and believes that there was direct trade via Byzantium through the Straits of Gibraltar peaking c. 475-550 AD. It is also possible that occasional artefacts were traded via Viking contacts prior to the commencement of raiding (Blindheim 1978: 173-174) in AD 795

¹ While it increased with Christianity it is likely to have occurred to some extent during the preconversion period (Neuman de Vegvar 1987: 23)

² Bowen (1972: 33-36) and Edwards (1990: 68-72) provide more details on the distribution of ceramic types in the region.

(Adair 1978: 190). Jankuhn's (1982: 34, Fig. 18; Davidson 1976) map (Map 19) shows that there was a possible trade route across the top of Europe. All of these routes might have facilitated eastern artefacts finding their way to Ireland.

The nature of the trade along the western sea-lanes in the early middle ages has been investigated in detail by Wooding (1993; 1996). Wooding offers a different perspective on the nature sea trade at this time; suggesting that initially, this was likely to have been arranged around consignments to an individual or *tuath* (1996: 95). Instead of a developed trading network between the east and Ireland, he suggests a 'tramp steamer' model is more suitable: 'a vessel which travels from port to port, wherever a cargo is available. It may sail one route regularly, but does not rely on doing so...the model has validity in helping to explain various goods in recurrent patterns and can offset the monolithic image of established trade conditioning the movement of travellers' (1996: 96)³. This model would help explain why we find decorative motifs only in certain areas of the insular region. With the absence of a developed trading network their sources would depend on single or repeat shipments from the east.

Three key items of trade would have an impact on Irish culture and art: artefacts or models; technology – maybe in the form of artists themselves; and ideas. In terms of this study, the transmission of ideas is just as important as artefacts⁴. The influences of foreign ideas in shaping the evolving early Irish church in its philosophy, technical ability and character have been discussed in the preceding chapters. It should also be noted that the transmission of cultural items was not always mercantile in nature. Pilgrims travelled to and from Gaul, Egypt and the Holy Land during this period (Meehan 1958)⁵. A difficulty for any study in this area is that with the absence of a detailed material record, illustrating the nature and impact of possible sources, means many of these inferred connections are often circumstantial. However, it is likely that the western Mediterranean, Constantinople / Jerusalem and the Coptic areas directly or indirectly influenced the Irish culture at this time⁶. The western Mediterranean region had a clear impact on the developing Irish church. Rome was responsible for the initial religious colonisation of the island and contact between the regions is likely to have been constant throughout the medieval period in some form. It is thought to

³ More broadly, Neuman de Vegvar (1987: 25) also argues against the necessity of direct trades describing the process as 'transcontinental hand-to-hand trade' to describe the movement of more exotic items from the east.

⁴ As discussed above, the Irish are believed to have created their own version of monasticism based around Egyptian/Syrian models. This extent of contact was not limited to art and there is evidence of eastern influences on early Irish literature (McNamara 1975: 2-3).

⁵ This region was also the source of many pilgrimage artefacts such as pilgrim flasks (Roe 1965: 200-201).

⁶ These regions – Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt – represent the economic centres of the East at this time (Lewis 1951: 7).

have been a source of textiles, icons, pottery (oil and wine) and other artefacts that support Christian practices (Mytum 1992: 79). However, as Wooding has suggested, this doesn't have to be an established trade network and might represent more the contact with individuals rather than representing contact between entire cultures.

The focus of this thesis is more concerned with the transmission of a concept or idea behind symbolism from the east, which means that the arguments pertaining to the stylistic similarities between the East and Ireland are more marginal to this focus. However, the extent, nature and resulting evidence of this relationship between the two cultures that can be demonstrated in the material record needs to be briefly discussed in order to substantiate a context for the capacity for cultural interaction. This study has suggested that the Irish High Cross symbolism developed under the impetus of eastern expressions of primary Christian symbolism at Constantinople and Jerusalem. An important consideration is that establishing an understanding of where this material originated can be problematic⁷. One of the most dominant and influential art movements at this time was the Coptic tradition (Wessel 1965). The Coptic region appears to have had an impact on Ireland as it did on the whole Mediterranean region (Badawy 1978: 362) and Coptic traits appear to have been particularly influential in early Christian Ireland.

The influence of the Constantinople /Jerusalem area is closely associated to the Coptic examples because many of these artefacts came along the same trade routes⁸. Coptic art and artists have both been found in these regions. Evidence of the influence of eastern culture on the material record of the insular region can be found in several areas. It can be isolated in motifs and works of art: the popular cross-of-arcs in Ireland was thought to have been brought to Ireland from its prominent use at the Santa Sophia, Istanbul (Kilbride Jones 1986: 9)⁹. Perhaps the most commonly cited example in the insular region of Jerusalem art is the similarity of the Hexham vine-scroll to the ornament of the Dome of the Rock, c. 691 (Cramp 1976: 267-8, figs 2-3). Coptic influence was not limited to aniconic motifs, for example, it has been suggested that Byzantine art might have influenced figure sculpture such as the treatment of the Daniels on the Kells Cross and on the Pictish Meigle No 2 slab (MacLean 1986: 179). Another possible source of artistic influence is that of the Armenian and Georgian early Christian cultures, as proposed by Richardson (1984a: 131-134; 1987; 1990; Henry

⁷ We know that Egyptian artists moved around the eastern Mediterranean working at buildings at Jerusalem, Damascus and Medina (Beckwith 1963: 28). The discussion in Chapter 3 has discussed the likelihood of non-Irish artists in more detail.

⁸ This dominance of Coptic traditions is not surprising because they also represented the business class of Egypt at this time (Lewis 1951: 96).

⁹ Fanning (1981: 146-147, Fig 31) has identified an example from Reask, Co. Kerry on Slab H where a Maltese cross has peacocks on either side of the cross, which is a distinctly Byzantine arrangement.

1964: 40)¹⁰. Richardson has investigated the similarities of Irish High Crosses with the monumental standing stones of Armenia and Georgia. Both Armenia and Georgia erected monumental standing stones in the fifth and sixth centuries (1990: 17-18). This Armenian and Georgian traditions and their relationship to Irish art have been discussed in other sections of this study.

One of the most focused criticisms of a possible Irish Coptic connection has been argued by Raftery (1965) who has questioned the extent of Coptic influence in the total absence of surviving early Coptic models. Raftery's main areas of concern can be seen to have been addressed by subsequent research in this area. It is useful to review and summarise the main points of Raftery's argument: he cautions against the drawing of conclusions that the Irish use of colour was entirely modelled on Coptic examples (1965: 194-195); additionally, he points to the pre-Christian use of interlace to argue against the influence of Coptic models (1965: 196); another issue of visual styles he disputes are the similarities in the treatment of figures in profile with Coptic figurative depictions; the association of the Fahan Mura triangular pediment with Coptic grave-slabs; furthermore, he has questioned the extent and nature of the contact between Irish clergy and Eastern clergy and whether this relationship can be taken for granted.

Since much of the evidence used to support Raftery's polemic revolves around the absence of early Coptic manuscripts it is important to recognise that there had been a significant discovery since the publication of his paper. The main substantiation for Raftery challenging the connection between colour and interlace in both artistic traditions is the lack of Coptic manuscripts preceding the Irish traditions¹¹. A study of the *Glazier Codex* was published after Raftery, by Bober (1967), who dates this Coptic manuscript to 400 A.D.¹² The '*Crux Ansata*' page (fols. 155v-156) displays the dominant use of interlace two and a half centuries before the earliest Hiberno-Saxon examples such as on the *Book of Durrow*, c. 680.A.D (Bober 1967: 41)¹³. While Bober (1967:42) acknowledges previous

¹⁰ The similarity between Georgian and Armenian sculptures has been discussed in detail by Der Nersessian (1977: 68). The relationship and influence of this sculptural tradition as a possible influence on the Irish use of panels has already been challenged in this study.

¹¹ 'as no Coptic manuscript early than the Irish ones exist, this statement cannot be substantiated and, therefore, as a proof of Coptic influence must fall away' (Raftery 1965: 196).

¹² Bober (1967: 31) offers a more detailed discussion of the chronology of this manuscript and scholarly research. While there are no surviving manuscripts, there is some evidence that can be found in Coptic textiles and carvings (Bober 1967; Rosenthal 1967; Badawy 1978).

¹³ Bober (1967) believes that the *Book of Durrow* is continuing an artistic development started in Coptic Egypt, a view supported by Badawy (1978: 362) and Stevenson (1982: 95). This is supported by Neuman de Vegvar (1987: 82) who has investigated the evolving insular manuscript traditions and linked both the Durham A.II.10 and the *Book of Durrow* to Coptic influences in particular the *Glazier Codex*: 'the anticlassical interlace of A.II.10 and Durrow and the idea of a cross-carpet-page come from a single cultural source. The extent of commerce and ecclesiastical contact with the eastern Mediterranean suggests rather a variety of available models, possibly including several of Coptic provenances, at work in Durrow and other insular manuscripts' (1987: 92).

connections to Coptic illumination preceding the ninth and tenth centuries appear circumstantial; he suggests the presence of the *Glazier Codex* does appear to be the 'missing link'¹⁴. However, Raftery (1965: 196) is correct to caution on the extent of Coptic influence on the adoption of colour use and interlace which can be found in the pre-Christian Irish art. Furthermore, there is evidence of the Irish use of similar colour schemes in other media such as metalwork. However, there is no evidence that *La Tène* art had a significant influence on early Christian art as Raftery suggests¹⁵. Alternatively, Coptic sources might have resonated with an existing tradition and importantly have been influential because they were Christian in nature¹⁶. Countering Raftery's other points, connections between Coptic and Irish art can also be addressed by subsequent studies. Rosenthal (1967) has been able to construct a persuasive case for the connecting Coptic figural treatments with western manuscripts¹⁷. However, the shape of the Fahan Mura triangular pediment is more problematic to clarify and its origins could have conceivably come from either Coptic or Roman territories¹⁸.

While there is not space in the present study to discuss the nature of the cultural interaction between Ireland and the East in more detail, the existence of the earlier *Glazier Codex* does justify the reconsideration of the nature and extent of Coptic connections to Ireland¹⁹. However, even in accepting the possibility of Coptic elements in Irish art this does still not mean that there was direct

Neuman de Vegvar suggests that the cross-carpet-page represents an amalgamation of sources like the *Glazier Codex* and the local traditions (1987: 94).

¹⁴ Bober continues a more detailed discussion linking the Coptic expression to Hiberno-Saxon traditions. Badawy (1978: 362) states, 'the more recent discovery of the *Glazier Codex* again provides the missing link for the early Coptic use of guilloche, especially as filling for crosses. The typically Irish ornaments of dot contouring, dotted backgrounds and two-ribbon plaiting are paralleled in Coptic Art'. He suggests that the introduction of Coptic elements in Irish-art is the mid-seventh century. Importantly for this study the codex illustrates the Coptic use of a ringed cross earlier than the Irish developments. While not the same form of ringed cross the implications of this shall be discussed in more detail in this chapter.

¹⁵ Mytum (1992: 70) has cautioned that 'Christian art at this period shows very little evidence of any indigenous *La Tène* influence, and this cannot be mere accident'. However, there is little evidence there is a continuation of an independent art style (Neuman de Vegvar 1987: 27)

¹⁶ Raftery does not appear to place any weight on the demand for Christian artefacts and their influence as part of the 'Cult of Saints' discussed over the preceding chapters.

¹⁷ Earlier Mason (1942), Roe (1960: 203) and Henry (1965: 168; 1967: 91) have pointed to similarities between the depiction of human figures in Irish and Coptic art. More recently these similarities have been noted by Veelenturf (1997: 108-09) recognising 'striking comparative material' but cautions that there is no 'absolute evidence'. Additionally, the depiction of some figures on Irish High Crosses has been seen as showing 'Egyptian' conventions, e.g. the second human interlace panel on the Banagher shaft (Hicks 1980: 19-20). Coptic traits have also been found in Pictish art, the St Andrews and Nigg slabs show eastern influence. The raised boss of the Nigg stone is seen as particularly Coptic (Mowbray 1936: 428, 434). Nash-Williams (1950: 23) has identified similarities between the crucifixion scenes on Welsh slabs, dating to the seventh century AD, and renderings from Coptic Egypt (Nos 130 & 337).

¹⁸ However, the shape of the Fahan Mura slab appears to share many characteristics with Coptic relief slabs (see Fig. 111) (Badawy 1978: 210-211).

¹⁹ Countering Raftery's (1965) logic; 'If, then, there is no valid case for supposing Coptic manuscripts to be earlier than Irish ones it follows that details in Irish manuscripts, deemed to be Coptic, cannot have been derived from that source'.

contact with the Coptic Church. Raftery correctly challenges the extent and nature of contact between Ireland the Egypt at this time; but can be questioned on believing that Rome was the primary source of Christian contact (1965:203). Contrary to this view, the influence of Coptic culture in Ireland has lead some to speculate on more direct contact (Mason 1942: 132; MacLean 1986: 179). Alternatively, rather than continental connections, it is possible that Hiberno-Coptic regions were responsible for this influence²⁰. Badawy (1978: 362) basing his belief on affinities of Irish manuscripts and metalwork thinks that Irish monks might have lived in Carthage in the seventh century. He suggests that Coptic elements enter into Irish art in the mid-seventh century²¹. While contact with Rome appears certain this does not mean that the eastern symbolism, ideas and art were not sought out in preference by the Irish – even though Rome as an intermediary. This study has demonstrated in several areas, that the Irish church opted for eastern traditions over Roman and this theme shall be explored in more detail in this concluding discussion. Raftery’s primarily concern is the material evidence of the relationship but this does not account for verbal or written guides as can be demonstrated by Adomnán’s record of Arculf’s travels²². Ultimately, in considering the form of the High Cross, there does not appear to be a direct correlation between the visual consistency of their form and the symbolic consistency of its morphology. While we find the same symbolic morphological elements being adapted their expression is very individual. This suggests that the creators were following a verbal or written model and expressing this in different ways rather than copying an established visual template. The nature of this idea is discussed in the following section.

THE IRISH HIGH CROSSES: THE EXTENT OF AN EASTERN CONNECTION

This overview of the contact between Ireland and the East details that many different parts of Irish culture and society were influenced. Many of the leading theories about the origins of the High Cross form also look the east and more specifically to its relationship with quintessential Christian

²⁰ Raftery (1965: 203) concedes that he had not investigated the Hiberno-Coptic region as a source for eastern material. Hillgarth (1984:12) and Fulford (1989) provide discussions on the archaeological evidence supporting a trade route from the Mediterranean to the insular region at this time. As discussed above, this contact has been seen as debatable (Wooding 1996:105), but Hillgarth does present a case for consideration. Furthermore, the exact nature of North African Christianity, which was strongly influenced by Coptic traditions, needs to be explored more fully. There is evidence of North African trade with Spain and South France at this time (Lewis 1951: 47) and evidence of their influence on Irish art has been suggested (Werner 1987; Neuman de Vegvar 1987: 89).

²¹ If Arculf, a Merovingian Gaul, was able to travel from Byzantium to Iona, it might also have been possible for a Coptic artist to be able to reach Ireland. *Dicuili* in *Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae*, vi. 12-18, (trans. Tierney 1967: 62-63) accounts for the presence of an Irish bother *Fidelis* who visited Jerusalem and Egypt before A.D.767. Harbison (1991: 29-31) indicates that other Irish travellers made it to the east and he details other later journeys.

²² *De Locis Sanctis* (trans. Meehan 1958: 43)

symbolism – the life of Christ. The rest of this chapter will attempt to understand the extent and nature of this influence from the perspective of the discussion presented in this study.

Two core questions remain to be explored:

1. Why does the Irish High Cross have a unique cross morphology: ringed-head, perforations, rolls, capstone and a base?
2. What can be deduced from the presentation and content of the decoration of the sides: the use of framed panels, the lack of inscriptions and the limited use of vegetation in decoration in this context?

A review of the scholarly debate on the origins of the High Cross form presented in this study is useful. One of the most convincing explanations behind the Irish High Cross form has been put forward by Kelly (1991: 138-139) who suggests that this is a representation (copy) of the 'true cross' located at the time at Jerusalem; with the design influenced or copied from eastern models. Richardson's (1994) development of parts of Roe's (1965) theory that the Irish High Cross and their capstones are copies of the *Anastasis* of the Holy Sepulchre offers key insights into the cross morphology. However, both explanations fail to explain why this ringed form was chosen over other cross forms and what its function was. The ringed form of the Irish High Crosses is not central to either Kelly's or Richardson's thesis. Under their explanations, a non-ringed cross could fulfill the same symbolic purpose without changing their theories. However, Roe's theory of linking the depiction of Christ at the centre of a cross, found on pilgrimage artefacts, warrants further investigation. In order to assess this model it is useful to look in further detail at the history and traditions of depiction of the Holy Sepulchre and its symbolic elements.

The prime association across all Christian cultures, between the cross and other artefacts, at this time, was with the Holy Sepulchre. Built over the burial chamber of Christ, this was the focus of Jerusalem, the *locus sanctus* of the secular and spiritual world and cosmic universe, and thus the holiest place in the Christian world (Eliade 1959:38, 43). Any representation of the Holy Sepulchre incorporated the 'Cult of the Cross'. As discussed above, this Cult derives from Constantine's use of the symbol and the erection of the Jewelled Cross of Golgotha to mark the crucifixion of Christ.

A trip to the Holy Land from Ireland was long, difficult and impossible for most pilgrimages of the Irish people. There were two main ways that the Irish church was able to 'compensate' for this and maintain this focus within everyday religious practice:

1. By using symbolic representations as substitutes - depictions occurring in different media. These were believed to be invested indirectly with the power of the original location. Vikan (1998: 247) defines the use of image bearing *eulogia* in healing as bi-location - where the image brings with it the power of the saint or location²³. These items could also be items not made by human hands, *acheiropoieta* such as the Shroud of Turin (Vikan 1998: 254, Fig 8.34)
2. By promoting relics of saints (foreign and indigenous) who, through the magic of contagion, were invested with the power of Christ. These would have acted as focal points for local communities.

Holy Sepulchre representations were important in most Christianised cultures in association with cemeteries (corporeal resurrection), baptisteries (spiritual rebirth) and Holy Week mimetic rituals. In discussing the range of variations in depictions, Vikan makes the important observation that

Surprisingly, variations in execution among the architectural copies were so wide as in some instances actually to mask the copy link, except to those informed of the builder's intention. In fact, mere coincidence of crude shape (basic roundness) or significant measure (the absolute size of one feature or the relative proportions among features) was enough to establish the link (1998: 249).

This suggests that we should be cautious at how exact we should expect depictions of the Holy Sepulchre to appear. There is also the possibility that there was other symbolism – from the Holy Sepulchre symbolic vocabulary – in use other than those identified of: the Steps of Golgotha, the Cross and the Capstone (canopy).

The role of the pilgrim has already been discussed in Chapter Four in terms of its function. A possible driving force behind this was what Vikan calls 'identity mimesis' was the journey of the *Magi* as the archetypal pilgrims to Bethlehem (1998: 249). An investigation of the distribution of iconographic panels on the Irish High Cross would support this theme as having a local significance (Data 155). The clustering of this image, when compared to the distribution of Adam and Eve scenes (Data 151), allows us to assume that this meaning had a special significance to the northern

²³ The use of the metal *flabellum* as a witness of pilgrimages of having seen (reflected) a location was discussed in Chapter Two. This is a popular symbolism form which has been linked to the ringed crosshead design.

Irish churches. This might indicate that there were different models of pilgrimage or that pilgrimage was encouraged (taught) through different media and methods²⁴.

The Christian belief system employs an analogous symbolic focus around an *axis mundi* as has been demonstrated in this study for the non-Christian belief system. Since the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was interpreted as the centre of the world, it quickly became the focus for Christian pilgrims. 'The Church of the Holy Sepulchre...was to be a monument without parallel, excelling all others in the empire, a witness to the central event of Christian faith, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ' (Armstrong 1993: 5). Additionally, it is important for this study to note that it also became Constantine's centre for religious policy and the interaction between church and secular affairs. The importance of this will be discussed in more detail below. Many different layers of symbolic association buttressed the symbolism of the Holy Sepulchre. Notably, the significance of the Holy Sepulchre is heightened by the supporting symbolism of its placement in Jerusalem. We have seen that the True Cross can be identified with the Tree of Life in *Genesis* and *The Apocalypse*. The Tree of Life was at the centre of Paradise and was nourished by four rivers (Ge 2: 9-10), as a symbol of messianic salvation (Ez 47: 12). The New Testament, building on *Ezekiel*, identifies the Water of Life and the Tree of Life with the redemptive life of Christ (Rev 12.1f). Golgotha itself is equated with Mt. Zion (Rev 14: 1) out of which flow the four rivers of salvation. The legend of the Cross describes the Crucifixion cross as being constructed from wood from the Tree of Life in Paradise and erected in the place where Adam lived and died (Cirlot 1962: 347; Werner 1990: 182). Christ himself is closely associated to the Tree of Life (Werner 1990: 191). In effect, the Holy Sepulchre marks not on the place that Christ died for humankind's sins but also the place that the first man died – Adam (who committed the first sin).

THE TRUE CROSS?

It is from this symbolically rich environment that we see the explosion of cross variations which ultimately led to the development of the High Cross form. What is not clear is the extent that Irish developments were dependent on the Holy Sepulchre symbolism from Jerusalem²⁵. At the apex of the High Cross traditions we find the highly decorated perforated ringed form. A more detailed

²⁴ It is interesting to note that while initially monuments would have been created to stimulate demand – as a centre of pilgrimage – an increasing Christian population would have started to influence supply and perhaps stimulate competition in the developments of Crosses.

²⁵ They might have been literal attempts to recreate the scene over the Holy Sepulchre or more generalized abstract attempts to capture the symbolism of the scene.

examination of the symbolism of this morphology can help shed light on the extent of the symbolic correlation to the Holy Sepulchre.

It is useful to review some of these findings. We saw earlier that the form of the Ahenny crosses was derived from metal archetypes of the cross (Henry 1965: 140)²⁶, a view refined by Richardson (1984a: 130-134), who believes that the primary prototype for the Irish High Crosses was a copy of the Holy Sepulchre and its metal cross (see Fig. 115). Alternatively, Kelly (1991: 138) believes that there is a closer connection between the Cross form and Arculf's description of the True Cross, from Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis*, 'There are three, not two, short beams, the transverse beam, that is, and the long one with is cut into two equal parts' (trans. Meehan 1983: 11). Kelly suggests that Adomnán's description of the True Cross

Contrasts two different forms of cross: two short beams suggest an equal-armed cross, three, a short transom and a long shaft cut in two, a particular form of Latin cross with the transom cutting the shaft at its mid-height. The True Cross described by Adomnán, therefore, was a Latin cross comprised of three pieces of wood, just like the St Oran's cross is of three pieces of stone, although it may be noted that the St Oran's Cross does not present the equal upper and lower shafts inferred for the True Cross (1991: 138).

This identification of the True Cross form has been indirectly challenged. Werner (1990), in an article that deals with the same quote from *De Locis Sanctis*, reaches a different conclusion of the cross form based on an analysis of the cross morphology. He is primarily interested in discussing the double-barred cross found on the Cross-Carpet pages of the *Book of Durrow* (Figs 214, 215), fol. 1v and fol. 33r²⁷. Werner (1990: 178) believes the double-barred cross is a representation of the True Cross, stating that: 'by the sixth century the sort of upper bar employed to suggest the board above Christ's head at the Crucifixion was added to the conventional Greek cross for certain emblems of the True Cross, the instrument of the passion. These crosses have come to be called Byzantine or patriarchal crosses'. Werner (1990:288) cites the cross on the north wall of the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem as an eastern example of this cross form²⁸. Some possible representations of the *titulus* in Ireland and Wales were discussed above in relation to halos in Chapter Two (Figs 82, 83). This

²⁶ Kelly (1991) backs Henry in the case of Ahenny crosses being based on metal crosses because of features such as the hatched edge mouldings and the forms of the bosses

²⁷ There is a similar cross illustrated in the *Book of Kells* (Fig. 215).

²⁸ 'A large cross once appeared at the centre of each wall. That on the north wall can still be seen, a *Crux gemmata* with round knobs at the top of each beam. Perhaps pomegranates, the knobs may symbolize celestial nourishment. Flanked by two trees, the Bethlehem cross is without doubt the "life-giving" True Cross intended to evoke associations with the Tree of Life, the relic of the Crucifixion, and the monumental jewelled Cross of Golgotha' (Werner 1990: 188).

identification and form would throw into question Kelly's interpretation of Adomnán's cross description.

Exploring the form of the cross further, depictions of the Cross surmounted by the haloed bust of Christ are common in early Christian art. The halo, as discussed above, is a possible source for the ringed form. Roe (1965: 217-220; 1960) has suggested that haloed depictions drew their inspiration from the scenes that are found on pilgrim flasks (such as Figs 67 to 76). It would not be surprising to find the end destination and the pilgrimage journey, depicted by representations on 'tools of the trade'. This connection between the scenes found on pilgrimage flasks, ampullae and standing stones can be perhaps found in the poem *The Dream of the Rood*, which Raw (1970: 242-244; 249-253) has suggested was inspired by scenes on pilgrimage flasks. Significantly, parts of the poem are incised on the Ruthwell Cross, England. Within this poem is a passage that describes Christ reigning from a tree of gold that is covered with five jewels – similar to a *crux gemmata*²⁹.

We know that there were jewelled crosses in Anglo-Saxon churches of the eighth and ninth centuries such as the Rupert Cross (Fig. 42), which is studded with jewels and enamel. Raw (1970: 242) has suggested that the jewelled cross was on par with the lamb as a symbol of Christ in early Christian art. She believes that the *Dream of the Rood* originated from within the Cult of the Cross, which was founded in Jerusalem (1970: 252-253). However, the same poem has led to another cross form being identified with the True Cross. Contrary to Raw, Mahler (1978: 442-449) argues that the cross form being described in the poem was a reliquary globe cross. This reliquary cross would have been to cover the only recorded relic of the True Cross in England, sent to Alfred. He believes that the most likely form of the jewelled cross would be a globe with a cross on the top, suggesting that the 'opening vision was composed to celebrate the arrival of the piece of the *lignum domini* around the year 885 and that envisioned the wood in its precious covering' (1978: 459). Mahler suggests that the jewelled cross might have looked like the *Ardennenkreuz* (Fig. 216) at Ephesus, in the seventh century Church of St John the Evangelist, where the cross is placed on a globe. An investigation of Mahler's 'true cross' form finds other examples from the east. There is a similar cross found in a pilgrim *graffito*, of the seventh century, at Ephesus, Church of Saint John the Evangelist (Fig. 217). The use of the globed cross is also found on Constantinian coins (Fig. 132). Whatever the correct interpretation in the *Dream of the Rood*, the *crux gemmata* was a common and varied motif of the time.

²⁹ It is unlikely that devotion to the five wounds was known in Anglo-Saxon England, though the theme of showing of the wounds at the Day of Judgment was well known, but the use of five jewels as a decorative on Anglo-Saxon crosses was sufficiently common to make it apparent to the audience that the poet was describing was a jewelled cross' Raw (1970: 240). This is another expression of the fivefold organisation covered in Chapter Two.

This does confirm Vikan's view that depictions of the Holy Sepulchre – and by association its key artefacts – are represented in a variety of ways at this time. The three forms of the True Cross described by Kelly, Werner and Mahler could all be correct identifications of different representations (interpretations) of the True Cross. The question remaining is which type of cross form is the Irish High Cross being influenced by and what symbolic elements are being emphasised or developed and why?

The depiction of the jewelled cross was a popular and established motif before the crucifixion scene became more widespread (Richardson 1994: 177). Richardson has identified three elements that were used on Irish High Crosses:

1. the cross decorated with gems
2. the pyramidal or stepped base
3. the canopy

There are prominent depictions of the Jewelled Cross in early Christian art, e.g. the Jewelled Cross depicted below the canopy at St Sophia (Richardson 1994: 180-181) and the Jewelled Cross on the starry heaven encircled by a jewelled wreath at St Apollinaire, Ravenna (Gough 1973, pl 155). Some other examples are illustrated here in Figs 117, 118 and 119. The canopy is part of the building that Constantine erected over the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. The stepped base signifies Golgotha, which has steps that led up to the great cross. There are also eastern examples of stepped bases on eastern monuments that will be discussed later in this chapter.

In summary there appear to be two broad types of *crux gemmata* in circulation in the early Christian period:

1. a model that conforms to Richardson's three-element plan – an architectural copy of the sepulchre
2. a more abstract version based on variations on a quincunx arrangement

The first model conveys a more complex symbolism that evokes images of the location and context. While the second is more common, it is harder to definitively identify as part of the Holy Sepulchre thematic³⁰. A consideration is that at the movement of Christ into the centre of the crosshead also marks a shift in symbolism from the *crux gemmata* to a crucifixion scene. How are we to understand this change?

³⁰ While these models can be differentiated for the purpose of research, in terms of complexity, this does not necessarily reflect on how they were read, e.g. the symbols '3.14159265358979323846...' can also be represented as the symbol π (recognising that the symbol *pi* has many other associations) – simplification or abstraction does not necessary detract from meaning.

THE HOLY SEPULCHRE: ARCHITECTURE AND CROSSES

The primary source of the Holy Sepulchre, for the early Christian Church and the modern scholar, is from *De Locis Sanctis*, which details the journeys of Arculf recorded by Adomnán³¹. It reports that Arculf undertook a pilgrimage to the east and was at an Easter litany at the Hagia Sophia, Constantinople. As well as describing his journey it is likely that he showed Adomnán the shape of the Sepulchre on a waxed tablet (Fig. 218): ‘the shape of which Arculf himself depicted for me on a waxed tablet’ (*De Locis Sanctis*: 2 trans. Meehan 1958: 43), perhaps like the waxed tablet from Springmount Bog, Co. Antrim, dating to the sixth or seventh century (Macalister 1920; Hamlin 1982b: 286). Reconstructed plans of the Holy Sepulchre are shown in Figs 219, 220, 221 and 220.

The description that Arculf gives is of the Holy Sepulchre:

‘this extremely large church, all of stone, and shaped to wondrous roundness on every side, rises up from its foundations in three walls. Between each two walls there is a broad passage, and three altars too are in three skilfully constructed places of the centre wall. Twelve stones columns of wondrous magnitude support this round and lofty church, where are the altars mentioned, one looking south, the second north, the third towards the west. There are two fourfold portals (four entrances that is), which cut across the three solid walls facing one another with the passageways in between (*De Locis Sanctis*: 2 trans. Meehan 1958: 43-45)’.

This church is referred to as the Church of the Anastasis (Fig. 223) (Kautheimer 1965: 19)³². Notably, the inside of the Hagia Sophia (Fig. 225), built by Justinian (527-565AD), shows similar characteristics (discussed shortly).

The day-to-day use of the eastern churches might have an impact on how we consider Irish churches were used as potential places of meditation and communal worship. It is believed that, as the Holy Sepulchre church became the centre of the Christian world and focus of pilgrim activity, it also became Constantine’s religious policy centre. This changed, or added a dimension to, the use of the churches as they acquired a legal function and enhanced secular status (Armstrong 1993: 7-9). There were coordinated spatial areas within the church to reflect these secular and religious roles. We know

³¹ Adomnán was Abbot of Iona (from 679 to 704 AD) and was the biographer of Columba.

³² *Anastasis* is Greek for resurrection and when depicted in Byzantine art, is thought to symbolize the resurrection of Christ and Christ’s breaking down the doors of Hell and releasing those inside (Vikan 1998: 254).

from *De Locis Sanctis* that Christ was buried in the northern part of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem and that a fragment of the True Cross was kept in the northern half of the Hagia Sophia, Constantinople.

Significantly, there is a striking similarity between the plans of the Holy Sepulchre, and other churches inspired by this plan, and the frontal view of a perforated ringed High Cross. The Irish High Cross shares similar divisions in symbolism of space with the capstones - if we view the cross as a plan and the capstone as being north - to that described for the Holy Sepulchre and the Hagia Sophia. The Irish capstones have been discussed above as being symbolic of local reliquaries³³. If we look at the plan of the monastic church of St Simeon Stylites, *Kal'at Sim'on*, we can see a form very similar to that of the High Crosses (Figs 226, 227). Significantly, the St Simeon's church resembles depictions of the cross of Symeon Metaphrastes. The similarity of cross form and architecture can also be seen that the Spalato Palace of Diocletian (Fig. 229) resembles Constantinian crosses of the time (Fig. 230). The exact relationship of cross and architecture is unclear. There are a wide variety of architectural forms at this time that conform to what is called the cross-in-square plan³⁴.

This identification of the High Cross form and the Church plan raises some questions about some of Richardson's premises. Richardson's identification of the Holy Sepulchre is based partly on the assumption that the capstones of the perforated ringed Irish High Crosses, such as the Ahenny cross or the reliquary capstones on the later Scripture Crosses are a side view (profile) representation of the Holy Sepulchre structures. A primary feature that Richardson used to identify the scene was the canopy of the Holy Sepulchre. However, if we entertain the idea that the Cross is a plan view of a church, shown frontally, then we are seeing the capstones from above and not from the side. This also means that if the capstones are not representing the canopy of the Holy Sepulchre then we need to re-evaluate their role in High Cross morphology. It has been suggested earlier that the similarities of the beehive capstones to the canopy are not entirely persuasive, because of the strong similarities between the domed capstones and the *clochán*. This study has argued that the use of reliquary shaped capstones, while their form originates in copies of churches, was more likely intended to bring focus to the remains and reliquary of a local saint/founder. The beehive capstones should be considered in this context. These are more likely to represent the dwelling of a more austere saint/founder or

³³ The discussion in Chapter Two identified reliquaries as having local significance since they were used to store the remains of Irish saints. This is contrary to Richardson's identification of them as part of the Holy Sepulchre symbolic composite.

³⁴ Possible variations of the cross-in-square plan in the construction of the High Cross form is illustrated in Fig. 247. The earlier Ahenny Crosses appear to have pinched arm pits to draw attention to their *Crux Gemmata* symbolism in comparison.

relevant facsimiles of reliquaries of local significance. The more developed church-like capstones are more likely to be copying gable reliquaries or tombs. Notwithstanding this, it is likely that the artists of the capstones, while representing local saints, would have looked to eastern art for inspiration.

If the capstones are representative of local reliquaries, this changes how we interpret their place within the symbolic composite. We have already discussed the use of relics by early churches to bring wider relevance to their own church. The local saints gained part of their religious 'status' through the 'power of contagion' in that when Jesus died his divine 'virtue' passed to the apostles and then to their followers, spreading out like a tree. This is illustrated in a ninth-century crucifixion ivory from Narbonne (Fig. 231). This shows that the apostles were linked to God. This connection was passed onto the Apostles followers³⁵. We can expect the connection to Jesus/God was best reinforced by a monastery focusing its claim to a direct relationship to Christ through a saint (local entity). This relationship was reinforced by the use of the ringed-cross to emphasise the placement of Jesus at the centre of the cosmos. This was also where the saints' spirit resided and was accessible locally, not necessitating a pilgrimage to the east. By recreating the centre of the cosmos, through the erection of the High Cross as *axis mundi* in the form of a cross-in-circle, Christ and the local saint are brought into direct contact within this sacred space before the audience.

An immediate criticism of this theory is the extraordinary variety of morphology of ringed crosses. However, since capstones are unique to High Crosses and are not found on other standing stones in Ireland, this supports their identification as part of local significance. It should also be noted that capstones are not found on all crosses and are found mainly on (perforated) ringed crosses. The theory that the capstones are representations of the Holy Sepulchre structures, on top of the True Cross also necessitates a distortion of dimension and proportion. However, there is evidence from scholars looking into Byzantine Christian art and architecture, that eastern examples are far from exact as well. This might involve the modern viewing having a different perception of space. Krautheimer (1965: 3) says that, 'the only justifiable conclusion seems to be that the medieval conception of what made an edifice comparable to another was different from our own. Medieval men must have had *tertia comparationis* utterly at variance with those that we are accustomed to'. Discussing the Holy Sepulchre, he goes further to state that, 'although the intention of imitating the Rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre is expressly stated in many instances, the buildings vary surprisingly from one each other; they are also astonishingly different from the prototype which they mean to follow'. His explanation for this is that what was important to early builders was, 'the content and

³⁵ Walter (1993: 12) has discussed ways in which this succession from the first Apostles was maintained in the eastern and western churches through the use of images and recorded succession.

significance of the building' (Krautheimer 1965: 3). This local variation in execution has been explained by Wilkinson (1993b: 27) in an investigation of the Holy Sepulchre forms: 'the variety of Constantinian church plans over the world suggests that local ecclesiastical bodies dictated their architecture'. This would indicate that content (symbolic intent) was more important than the execution (visual faithfulness) to the early churches – a view that this thesis has argued in terms of High Cross development.

There is also an indication that a plan shown vertically might not have appeared that bizarre to architects and artists of that time either. Ousterhout (1998: 81) has suggested that 'any examination of Byzantine architecture must begin with the deprogramming of the modern viewer'. He goes further to say that while modern buildings tend to be functional for human movement, 'which is two-dimensional, whereas form, the shape of the building, is three-dimensional - and a Byzantine church is insistently three-dimensional. Moreover, a building does not just house events: its form may amplify, sanctify, comment upon, and interact with the functions it houses, and both form and function can be empowered by the interaction'.

While the form of these Byzantine churches varies, the basic plan of some of the largest and most spectacular such as the Hagia Sophia, share in common the cross-in-square plan found utilised for the fifth-century Church of St John the Baptist in the Stoudios monastery in Constantinople. Other churches within the Byzantine world have this plan (e.g. Figs 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237). Some cross-in-square churches look remarkably like Irish High Crosses (Figs 240, 241). The layout of these early churches conforms to a common theme, organised in anticipation of Christ's return from the east (Ousterhout 1998: 84, Fig. 4.3). The orientation of Irish High Crosses to the east has been discussed above³⁶. The central feature of the church, the sanctuary and the altar, was a throne in preparation; a *ciborium* or a canopy covered the altar.

The underlying differentiation of early religious architecture is that the pagan temples were the homes of the gods, whereas the church was a place where a community gathered to worship (Armstrong, 1993: 9). After the suppression of 'pagan' beliefs, the Church became the 'house of God' and community (Ousterhout 1998: 88). While, the Garden of Eden is prominent before the fall of man (Ge 2: 8; Ge 13:10, Eze 28:13); images such as this do not appear to have played a prominent role in early Christian architecture. An explanation for this is that the use of pillars, in the construction of temples, is thought to have been to create the aspect of an artificial (symbolic) tree

³⁶ Fig. 88 shows the location of crosses to the east of some of the key Irish monasteries.

grove (Rees 1992: 69). The Bible is quite clear that the worship of groves is forbidden (De 16:21; Isa 1:29; Isa 17:8; Isa 27:9; Mic 5:14) and the idolatry of groves by the Israelites is described in disparaging terms (Jud 3:7; 1Ki 15:13; 2Ki 13:6; 2Ki 17:10; 2Ki 21:3-7). The Bible provides examples where groves were destroyed to stamp out idolatry (Jud 6:28; 2Ki 18:4). Notably, the early Christian church architecture appears to be deliberately cosmic and far removed from more secular and non-Christian Mediterranean-derived architecture.

THE DOME: ARCHITECTURE AS COSMOS

It has been discussed earlier that the cosmos was perceived as circular and the (secular) world was square. The dome of these churches were built on square foundations to symbolise that this was a place where the earth met the heavens - to act as a *locus sanctus*.

The most noticeable feature of the Hagia Sophia is the dome that dominates the structure (Fig. 242). It is important to understand the significance of the dome in the development of early Christian architecture in order to follow this line of investigation in relation to the Irish High Crosses. Rees (1992: 143-144) identifies the architectural dome as the 'dome of heaven'. She cites the belief that the sky was conceived in the east as a giant tent that was supported by heaven. Furthermore, Baldwin Smith (1971: 74), in a detailed study on the significance of the dome in different cultures, points out that the importance of this symbolism is derived from many sources, for example associations with the pine cone, 'the habit of associating a pointed somewhat swollen type of domical form, which had originally taken the shape of primitive huts of pliable materials, with (the)...pine cone was of great antiquity'. This archetypal shape gained significance because it is the fruit of the Mesopotamian Tree of Life, the significance of which has been discussed earlier. In the early Christian period the 'cone' took on the role of resurrection, symbolising the tomb of Christ.

Baldwin Smith (1971: 75) also suggests that the conoid, tholoid, domical shapes were influenced by the classical *omphalos*³⁷. He suggests that the domed form was important to Christianity for five reasons:

- ⊠ its sepulchral symbolism and tradition that the *omphalos* at Delphi, the round hut with a cupola, was the tomb of a legendary god or king;
- ⊠ the idea of the gradual transformation of the *omphalos* from a prehistoric shelter into a tomb and then into a shrine with rites for the departed dead, which closely paralleled the transformation of the *teragurium* into a Christian tomb and then into a *martyrium*

³⁷ The shape of the early Irish huts or *clochán* also conforms to this imagery.

- ✦ its relation to a belief in resurrection
- ✦ its acceptance as the speaking manifestation of divinity
- ✦ its significance as a central point of an earthly and spiritual domain.

He argues that it is assumed that the *ciborium* over the altar, perhaps the Holy Sepulchre itself, functioned as an *omphalos*. Golgotha is referred to as the 'centre of the earth' and - as the place where Adam died - already has *omphalos* characteristics. Notably, it is also the location of Christ's cosmic rebirth.

There is evidence that this theme of the dome had entered more than artistic symbolism in early Christian Ireland. Ó Carragáin (1989: 33-34) in discussing visual and literary Eucharistic symbols in early Ireland points to Chapter Twenty-Six of *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* to illustrate this type of symbolism³⁸. He discussed the talks of St Brendan with St Paul (who grew up at St Patrick's monastery). 'The Irish Spiritual Hermit inhabits a landscape which is entirely symbolic; and its symbolism is primarily eucharistic...The Island also ... has eschatological dimensions: although round (like a eucharistic loaf) it is also, like the heavenly Jerusalem, as high as it is broad (Apocalypse 21: 16)'. This may imply that the dome was being interpreted and its expression not limited to architectural models.

Baldwin Smith (1975: 77-78) details other symbolic associations that utilise the domed form such as the 'cosmic egg' and the 'cosmic helmet'³⁹. Of particular importance to this study is the cosmological thinking that the heavens were associated with the ceilings of sacred buildings. In Roman and Greek art there are numerous instances of blue ceilings decorated with stars as the birthplace of humankind e.g. Figs 117 and 118. It is important when considering the dome to bear in mind what we are discussing not only their plan or profile but also their interior when viewed from below⁴⁰.

Irish High Crosses demonstrate an interesting shift in decoration and form in the later half of their development in that Christ replaces the bossed decoration, usually of a central boss and four surrounding bosses, in the centre of the ringed-head. The distributions of Christ on the head of

³⁸ *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*: 'The island itself was small and round, about a furlong in circumference and as high as it was wide' (trans. Webb 1983: 189)

³⁹ There is a tenth century tale from the *Book of Lecan* that is relevant to this imagery. From *The Adventure of St Columba's Clerics* (trans. Stokes 1894b: 145) there is a passage that states 'a vast arch above the Lord of His royal throne, like an adorned (?) helmet, or like a king's diadem'. This passage links both the architectural symbolism with that of the helmet.

⁴⁰ The following discussion details some first hand impression of the domes, see footnote 43.

crosses by cross type are shown in Data 93 (discussed in Chapter Two). The majority of these depictions occur on the more developed perforated ringed crosses. At the same time, we find the rolls in the armpits of the crosses or the inside of the outer rings. This has been explained as a functional change to accommodate the more detailed iconographic themes found on the heads of later crosses. This is a move from *crux gemmata* symbolism to a more direct symbolising of the crucifixion. However, it could also be explained that the crosses were attempting to emulate a change to architectural symbolism. This might indicate that the more prominent positioning of Christ within the cross ring was an attempt to represent the inside of an architectural dome. What the Irish High Crosses might be emulating is a truly three-dimensional representation that shows the interior (ceiling) of the dome on the face of the cross where we see Christ crucified. There are numerous examples in the early Christian period of depicting Christ on the inside of the dome e.g. the dome at the Daphni monastery, Katholikon; Chora Monastery, Constantinople. The ceiling of the Santa Maria dell'Amiraglio (the Matroarana), Palermo (Fig. 244), while later, provides an interesting perspective of ceiling art. The layout of the ceiling surrounding the central dome bears a striking resemblance to the layout of the High Cross head with decorations on the cross arms.

Another factor when considering the whole cross is that, as Data 78 shows, most of the perforated crosses with rolls have bases and nearly twice as many have stepped bases over non-stepped. The importance of the stepped base to the Holy Sepulchre imagery has been discussed above and evidence of its significance can also be found in the iconography of Irish High Crosses. The Sacrifice of Isaac is a religious metaphor in the Old Testament that prefigures the depicted of Christ by God in the New Testament; it is not surprising that we find that Isaac sacrificed on a stepped altar, eg. on the east shaft of the Killybegs Cross, Co. Meath. The knobs, canopy and stepped base are all forms that have been identification relevant to Holy Sepulchre imagery.

Additionally, while less conclusive, the boss-decorated cross, taking into account its role as a possible skeuomorph or a *crux gemmata* representation, resembles in layout eastern churches such the Hagia Sophia - which has a central boss (dome) surrounded by four pillars; the Church No. 3 Prelav at Seliste (Fig. 243 and Ousterhout 1998: 96: Fig. 4.16e), and Katholikon at Mount Athos, Lavra Monastery (Fig. 239 and Ousterhout 1998: 106: Fig. 4.26; 4.28) which is based around four circles in a cruciform pattern, also shown in Fig. 235 and Fig. 243e. This might suggest that some High Crosses represent the plan of a domed cross-in-square plan church and others represent the same structure from below looking up at the interior of the dome⁴¹.

⁴¹ Alternatively, this thesis has suggested in Chapter Two, that bosses found on some High Crosses might be a representation of the Rock of Calvary as part of the Holy Sepulchre symbolism.

It is interesting that there are two church plans depicted in the *De Locis Sanctis*. The more commonly discussed is the plan of the Holy Sepulchre but there is also a plan of the Church of Jacob's Well. In this depiction the well in the centre of the intersection of the cross arms covered by a high roof (Tsafrir 1993: 6) (Fig. 248). This layout is similar to what is proposed by this study. It is significant that the plans of these churches were copied at all. Why weren't they depicted as we find on the Temptation page of the *Book of Kells* (compare with Fig. 129)? There were no structures in Ireland at the time close to their forms. Their emphasis in *De Locis Sanctis* demonstrates that Adomnán was impressed by them and held a plan view to be of more importance than a profile of the buildings. What is also interesting is that Arculf recorded the architectural layouts in such detail as to be able to recount this to Adomnán. There must have been a temptation to replicate such plans⁴². When considering the correlation between the cross shape and church architecture it is less important to solve which came first than to recognise that both conform to a common layout that would have been recognised and have meaning⁴³.

There are other morphological correlations between the form of the perforated High Cross and the architectural features of the domed eastern churches. This can be illustrated by looking at the largest of these domes at the Hagia Sophia. The Hagia Sophia's great dome is over 100 feet (30.5 m) in diameter and is raised approximately 180 feet (54.9 m) of the ground (Fig. 242). One of the most dramatic features of this dome was that that light streamed in from numerous windows⁴⁴. If we

⁴² Since some cross-slabs have been connected to gospel pages in form, is a vertical stone-page of a picture that different from a vertical architectural plan?

⁴³ It is also possible that the common form of the cross-in-square plan was not the only layout that was replicated in different media (see Fig. 251).

⁴⁴ An early impression is reported by Procopios, from *De Aedificiis*, writing in the early sixth century about the church dedicated in 573 A.D., describes the Hagia Sophia: 'it is distinguished by indescribable beauty, excelling both in its size, and in the harmony of its measures, having no part excessive and none deficient; being more magnificent than ordinary buildings, and much more elegant than those which are not of so just a proportion. The church is singularly full of light and sunshine; you would declare that the place is not lighted by the sun from without, but that the rays are produced within itself, such an abundance of light is poured into this church.... Now above the arches is raised a circular building of a curved form through which the light of day first shines; for the building, which I imagine overtops the whole country, has small openings left on purpose, so that the places where these intervals occur may serve for the light to come through. Thus far I imagine the building is not incapable of being described, even by a weak and feeble tongue. As the arches are arranged in a quadrangular figure, the stone-work between them takes the shape of a triangle, the lower angle of each triangle, being compressed where the arches unite, is slender, while the upper part becomes wider as it rises in the space between them, and ends against the circle which rests upon them, forming there its remaining angles. A spherical-shaped dome standing upon this circle makes it exceedingly beautiful; from the lightness of the building, it does not appear to rest upon a solid foundation, but to cover the place beneath as though it were suspended from heaven by the fabled golden chain. All these parts surprisingly joined to one another in the air, suspended one from another, and resting only on that which is next to them, form the work into one admirably harmonious whole, which spectators do not dwell upon for long in the mass, as each individual part attracts the eye to itself (trans. Lethaby and Swainson 1894: 24-28). The dome is also described in a poem by Paul the

accept that the cross-ring was a plan of a dome then it is not unreasonable to assume that if this was a conscious attempt to emulate the interior of a dome and that the perforations in the armpits of the cross might add to this effect. As discussed, Reuterswärd (1986) provides a discussion of the windows and architectural variations that display the light of God as '*Ego sum Lux Mundi*'— a device that later was developed more fully in stained glass windows. This symbolised the transfiguration of Christ⁴⁵.

Light might have been indicated by another morphological feature of the High Crosses. If we revisit Adomnán's description: 'Towards the east, in the place that is called in Hebrew Golgotha, another very large church has been erected. In the upper regions of this a great round bronze chandelier with lamps is suspended by ropes and underneath it is placed a very large cross of silver, erected in the same place where once the wooden cross stood embedded, on which suffered the Saviour of the human race' (*De Locis Sanctis*: 3 trans. Meehan 1958: 49; my emphasis). It is possible that the rolls in the armpits of the crosses (where the light emanates from) might be the lamps hanging from the dome, the perforations of the cross providing physical and symbolic light. This might help explain some of the more ornamental rolls found on Irish High Crosses: they could be copies of lamps. This might also explain their different positioning on High Crosses, in the armpits and on the ring⁴⁶. They are mainly found when the crucifixion scene takes over the centre of the cross. This also coincides with the architecture of Constantinian churches of a large dome, cross on the ceiling of this dome and hanging lamps. The hanging chains and decorations from the Cross of Agilufu (Fig. 121) and the Cross presented to Rome by the Emperor Justin II (Fig. 122) were symbolic of these lamps and represent a different way of displaying them. Lamps would appear as round objects when viewed from below.

Silentiary, also writing in the sixth century: 'Above all rises into the immeasurable air the great helmet [of the dome], which, bending over, like the radiant heavens, embraces the church. And at the highest part, at the crown, was depicted the cross, the protector of the city. And wondrous it is to see how the dome gradually rises wide below, and growing less as it reaches higher. It does not however spring upwards to a sharp point, but is like the firmament which rests on air, though the dome is fixed on the strong backs of the arches....Everywhere the walls glitter with wondrous designs, the stone for which came from the quarries of seagirt Proconnesus. The marbles are cut and joined like painted patterns, and in stones formed into squares or eight-sided figures the veins meet to form devices; and the stones show also the forms of living creatures....' (trans. Lethaby and Swainson 1894: 42-52).

⁴⁵ The symbolism of the perforated ringed head as symbolic of the transfiguration of Christ was discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

⁴⁶ Supporting this identification, the prominence of the lamps within the dome at the Hagia Sophia is also reported by Paul the Silentiary, from a sixth century poem: 'a thousand others [lamps] within the temple show their gleaming light, hanging aloft by chains of many windings. Some are placed in the aisles, others in the centre or to east and west, or on the crowning walls, shedding the brightness of flame. Thus the night seems to flout the light of day, and be itself as rosy as the dawn.' (trans. Lethaby and Swainson 1894: 42-52). It is tempting to draw parallels between the the orientation of these lamps along cardinal orientations or 'on the crowning walls' to explain the presence of rolls on the inner or out rings of crosses.

However, this does not explain why the Irish High Crosses would attempt to adopt these particular architectural characteristics. But, if we accept the suggestion made earlier (Chapter Five) that the Irish High Crosses served as an 'inverted church' - for a community that was not used to worshipping indoors - this seems to be a sensible adaptation. Instead of the focus of a congregation around the trees it was suggested above that the High Cross form was substituted in Christian practices. A primary concern for the early church was to compete with the indigenous belief systems as the earlier discussion on the Christianisation of early Irish culture illustrates. The orientations symbolism that is employed by both belief systems can be seen to be analogous.

It is important to recognise that church buildings in Ireland were not very large in the early Christian period, hardly the size to accommodate a community service. Archaeological evidence suggests that the development of church buildings only started in the eighth and ninth centuries, by the tenth century they were more common in larger settlements and only from the eleventh century onwards are they found more commonly in other areas (Harbison 1970: 49; Hamlin 1984: 119)⁴⁷. With this spatial development of church buildings, there is a corresponding decline in the construction of Irish High Crosses. This suggests that once churches were of an adequate size to accommodate the congregation the Irish High Cross lost its significance and purpose. Not only was there a better place to congregate but also worship inside a building was finally accepted⁴⁸. Trees were declining in religious relevance to the Irish people and the need to accommodate pre-Christian associations, with a *axis mundi* like an Irish High Cross, declined⁴⁹.

Significantly, there is no evidence that the early Irish churches attempted to imitate the cruciform plan (Ralegh Radford 1977: 4; 6 Fig. 1). This is unusual considering the widespread use of the cross-in-square plan in both Europe and the East. As a comparison of traditions, it should be noted that in Armenia, where Richardson has suggested that the crosses and capstone might have originated, there was a very developed stone church tradition. This involved usually variations of a dome on a cross-

⁴⁷ The earliest references to a stone church in Ireland date to around AD 788 (Harbison 1970: 48).

⁴⁸ The ceremonies were carried out in the *oratorium* (Ralegh Radford 1977: 2).

⁴⁹ An account that might reflect a transition of these beliefs is reported in the felling of *Eó Rossa*, one of the sacred trees, which was cut down and incorporated architecturally into a ceiling (dome). In the *dindsbenchas* poem (trans. Stokes 1894a: 420), after the tree had been cut down, St Lasairian distributed the wood amongst the saints of Ireland. The account also records that St Moling used the wood to build the roof of his oratory. This event is also recorded in *The Birth and life of St Moling* (Ch. 11) where the *Yew of Ross* is described as being built into an oratory by Gobbán the Wright (trans. Stokes 1906: 281). This would indicate that at the very least the saints at this time were aware of the significance of the trees in Ireland. The incorporation of this non-Christian sacred wood into church buildings might have been an attempt to reconcile local worship to Christian practices.

in-square plan – these took the form of a domed basilica, e.g. Mastara, St John, niche-buttressed square plan without columns, sixth or seventh century; Vagharshapat, St Gayané, domed basilica, 630-641; Talin, Cathedral, domed basilica with apses on east and west, seventh century; Odzun, domed basilica with covered porches on east and west, seventh century (Csufresno 2001). There are many examples of later tenth-to-twelfth century churches developing on this plan. While the Armenians did not develop a ringed or perforated crosshead on their freestanding crosses forms, what their church forms do emphasise is a dome that has many windows to let light into the central area. The perforated Irish ringed cross might have been attempting to recreate the dome similar to this tradition.

It was suggested above that the Irish High Crosses was used for education, or the advertising of messages, that involved speaking directly to a community. If we continue along the line of thought that the High Crosses represent a ‘plan’ of the Holy Sepulchre, of a church emulating this architecture through the cross form, then some other conclusions can be drawn as to the use of crosses as communication tools. If we return to the account of Arculf’s pilgrimage, he offers other insights into Christian practices and rituals in the east. Adomnán reports that Arculf visited both the Hagia Sophia and the Holy Sepulchre and attended ceremonies there. These would have been held under the dome. Most likely the combination of ritual and architecture would have had a powerful impact on someone used to a less developed infrastructure of worship and ritual⁵⁰. While the architectural achievements of the east would have been difficult to emulate, the core elements of the ritual may have been recorded and transferable⁵¹.

Directly below the Dome of the Holy Sepulchre is an architectural space known as the *Naos*, where the community gathered for communal worship (see Fig. 242). Richardson’s explanation of the capstones would place the *Naos* directly over the cross and within the *axis mundi*, hardly a place where a living community could gather⁵². If we alter the perspective of the crosses to a plan view and accept, as argued above, that the capstones are more likely to represent local saints, this facilitates a

⁵⁰ The fascination with the east wasn’t limited to Ireland alone. Tierney (1967: 2) reports that ‘a major stimulus and inspiration in the ascent of the Frankish empire to fame and consequence was the rivalry and emulation of the Byzantine emperors. He points out that the palace chapel at *Aix-la-Chapelle* imitated in detail the *chrysotriklinos* in the imperial palace at Constantinople. Furthermore, Charles in his presiding over the synod of Frankfort in 794 recalled the practice established by Constantine of presiding over the *Council of Nicaea*’. Importantly, this example shows another related culture emulating Byzantine ritual and practices through the emulation of architecture and rituals associated with it.

⁵¹ It should be kept in mind that while Arculf is the only recorded visitor to the east of this time and others might have made the journey and bought back different information to Ireland.

⁵² The non-Christian association of *axis mundi* as a doorway – *sidi* – between the living kin and ancestors has been discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

different perspective of the *Naos*. The capstones, symbolic of the local saint/founder, place them in direct contact with the centre of the world - Jerusalem- and hence, Jesus and God, a link between community, saint and Jesus. It might have been more believable that the dome faced (not literally) in the direction of Jerusalem rather than up into the sky. Jerusalem was the quickest route to Jesus (as the pre-eminent spiritual focus). This is to some extent supported by the Bible where pilgrims and saints are described as having their faces towards Zion (Israel) (Jer 50), and pilgrims are seen as looking for a heavenly country (Heb 11:16) or a heavenly city (Heb 11:10).

If we accept that the ringed cross is the inside of the dome this would mean that the *Naos* (gathering place) was directly in front of the Irish High Cross, which would make more sense. It might have been important that while all bases were generally signifiers of Golgotha, there was a dimensional shift to looking upwards. If we recall O Dwyer's diagram of the Stowe Missal confection, the participants of the mass were organised in the form of a High Cross – their position mirrors that of the cross in front of them. This is what happens when you go to a service in a church where you are positioned beneath the symbolic structure of the roof – just as in a modern church your seating is predicated on the cruciform plan of the building⁵³.

To review these findings, the symbolic topography of the plan of Hagia Sophia and the Irish High Cross form are remarkably analogous. The capstone is the reliquary or domed top that is symbolic of the burial of a saint or founder. On the plan of the Hagia Sophia, relics are located in the north of the church. Both constructions are constructed around cardinal points that reinforce this orientation. The buildings, as with the crosses, are orientated to the east in expectation of Christ's return. The base of the crosses lacks the developed religious iconography of the head of the cross and is also the only place where we find inscriptions of secular devotions and memorials. The south of the Hagia Sophia was also reserved for secular activities. The south gallery was set aside for imperial worship. Ousterhout (1998: 91) reports that,

by the tenth century, *De Ceremoniis* [the Book of Ceremonies] lists seventeen special ceremonies in which the emperor officially participated. Set in the magnificent interior of the Hagia Sophia, the exchange of the Kiss of Peace between the emperor and the patriarch

⁵³ This might also to some extent explain the geometric designs on the shafts of the crosses, which show some superficial resemblances to the decorations of Christian pavements dating from the late fourth century. These patterns take on different shapes to signify different territories or sacred areas such as the shrine of a saint (Kitzinger 1993a: 640). An example of the patterning is at the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem (Figs 245 and 246) (Kitzinger 1993a: Figs 3 and 4).

would have emphasised the unity of the church and state. The great dome, the celestial canopy in which God dwelled, sanctified the events and ceremonies that transpired below⁵⁴.

Considering that some standing stones and *ogam* stones are described as witnesses of legal land boundaries and hereditary rights there is no reason not to assume that Jesus was depicted, as at the Hagia Sophia, to act as witness and replacing the role of ancestors. Moreover, considering the importance of the Irish aristocracy in patronising the church, a local version of *túath* king and local bishop would not be an unreasonable expectation. This may be demonstrated in the discussion of the demarcation scenes in Chapter Five.

Other correlating meanings should also be taken into account. Firstly, the level of literacy was probably limited to the priest caste (possibly some secular elite) of this time. As a result a cross was used as a signature on documents, as a substitute for being able to inscribe one's own name and also as recognition that people were taking the pact in the sight of God/Jesus⁵⁵. This might be another explanation why Christ was positioned in the centre of the High Cross. The other significant use of Christ as witness might be found in the use of pilgrim mirrors to 'capture' and be eyewitness of Holy Places in the east. If the *flabellum* was one of the contributing, or concurrently shared, meanings of the Irish High Cross form then depicting a two-way mirror or 'bi-location' might have been more than symbolically functional.

By looking for a possible use of High Crosses we might fall victim to our own limited utilitarian conception of buildings. As Ousterhout (1998: 98) puts it: 'How did the Byzantine viewer regard all this? So decorated and arranged, the church could become the image of heaven, or of the cosmos, or of the Holy Land. It was a symbolic and flexible framework whose meaning shifted with the ceremonies it housed, a vessel to enhance and comment on ritual'. This possible interpretation is based on a series of factors (detailed here) in order to be plausible. The main problem with this approach is that it fails to account for the sheer variety of inscribed cross forms and High Cross morphological variations. It seems out of place for such a refined symbolism to be applied to only a few crosses. There also appears to be no evidence that the High Crosses were perceived this way. However, this interpretation does not appear out of place if we revisit the symbolism of the base cross form – the cross-in-circle.

⁵⁴ Eliade has also noted the organisation of early Christian Basilica, Cathedrals and Byzantine churches around symbolic cardinal orientations (1959:61-62).

⁵⁵ The use of cross as a symbol of witness of Christ in the form of a signature was discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

THE RINGED CROSSES: REEVALUATING THEIR SYMBOLISM

If we revisit the possible origins of the ringed-head form in Ireland, the simple cross-in-circle and the more distinctive *chi-rho* monogram, we can reinterpret these variations in this light. A review of some of the facts is helpful. As has been demonstrated in this study, the cross-in-circle motif was not unique to Ireland – what was unique was the three-dimensional architectural manifestation of this form. The wide variety of cross forms based around the central theme of the cross-in-circle device would indicate that this motif was being subject to experimentation. The *chi-rho* appears in various forms of faithfulness to its original. We know that the High Crosses and cross-slabs are associated closely with monasteries. What we do not know is what initiated and subsequently connects its use by a disparate and non-unified early church. Furthermore, what led to their experimentation with this one motif? While the motif is found widely over Ireland – it did not gain the same penetration in other European countries. Unlike other motifs from the East and Europe, we cannot explain all the variations and ringed form as being from different models. This would suggest that it had a specific meaning for the Irish church. Various theories as to its meanings have been documented in this study.

Ireland at this time was undergoing significant and often dramatic changes to its politics, religion and social organisation. The major change that occurs between the fifth and eighth centuries, when there is use of the variants of this motif, is the increase in dwelling sizes and urbanisation. The word *urbs* was derived from *urvum* ‘the curve of a ploughshare’ or *urvo* ‘I plough around’ and *orbis* ‘a curved thing’ ‘a globe’ ‘the world’. ‘The word for city immediately provoked the association with ploughing’ (Rykwert 1976: 134)⁵⁶. Connected to this are the accounts of the founding of Rome and Constantinople whose boundaries and layout are both described by John the Lydian as being cut into the earth by oxen yoked to a plough (Burch 1927: 129). Both St Patrick and St Brigit are described in similar land demarcation scenes; additionally, kings in Irish Law had as one of their core roles knowledge of land law and ritual as discussed above. One of the most significant changes to Ireland at this time was the development of the market place *óenach* to being a central fixed trading area. Symptomatic of the changes in the economy, the construction of monasteries changed the landscape and seasonal markets with non-Christian associations dropped from use. The market crosses were a central feature of this area and eventually replaced the church as the central point of the growing monastic settlements. Notably, the erection of the High Crosses would have been a statement to most travellers and locals that the monastery or settlement was Christian. However, perhaps the

⁵⁶ Relevant to this discussion, Christ has often been connected to ploughing symbolism in early Christian art (Milburn 1988: 1-7). Additionally, described in similar terms in the Bible in *Mathew* 13 and *Luke* 8.

message was the ringed cross and the High Cross was just a high billboard or large frame for a message with a more specific purpose.

It is also possible to reconcile some of the primary symbolism associated with the ringed cross form. The four most convincing symbolic interpretations and variations of the ringed cross form are:

1. The *Chi-rho* motif
2. The *Flabellum*
3. Christ at the centre of the cosmos/ in a halo
4. *Crux Gemmata*

While these appear to be distinct themes, they are all interrelated, sharing the same orientation symbolism. The *chi-rho* motif was the symbol of Constantine but more importantly was associated closely with the 'redevelopment' of Jerusalem and also with the founding of Constantinople as the new centre of the Christian empire. The logo incorporating Christ's name with Jerusalem and his place of crucifixion being at the centre of the world. The *chi-rho* is not just the moving of the CH of *Christos* into the wreath it is the movement of the *chi-rho* into the centre of a ringed cross – an *axis mundi*, which was a location. The prime *axis mundi* was Jerusalem, but the *chi-rho* was Constantine's symbol. The *flabellum* gains its symbolic power from the similarity of its form combined with its use by pilgrims as a witness of the Holy City. The use of Christ in a halo as has been demonstrated was known as an architectural motif – of Christ looking down from the heavens. The *crux gemmata* is more difficult to limit to one interpretation, being linked to various meanings in this study to: a representation of the True Cross, symbolic of the True Cross or the emphasis being on the wounds of Christ.

If we revisit the connection discussed above between the surveying and layout of land by Patrick, is at least superficially similar to Constantine laying out the boundaries of Constantinople; some other features of this act support the connection of the *chi-rho* to holy cities. Burch (1927: 130) in discussing this scene has noted that as Constantine is walking around the future boundaries of his city he marks the boundary with an object: 'According to the assumption of the augurship and the augural sign, the *lituus*, was a chief feature of the Romulus story. In Philostorgius the *lituus* had become a spear, in Aldhelm the *labarum*'. A *labarum* is variant form of a *chi-rho* without the ring. It is often depicted as a *crux ansata* (handled cross – portable). We recall the use of the surveyors symbols on a roman *stela* of the *agrimensor Lucius Aebutius Faustus*, at Ivrea, Piedmonte (Fig. 158) (Rykwert 1976: 51). This device is strikingly similar to the *chi-rhos* that are associated with Constantine's symbols. The *chi-rho* symbol might symbolise more than just Christ. In an Irish context, it could have taken more directly the association with Constantine's city or as a metaphor for the prime Christian

city. There is evidence that Constantinople was intended to be this kind of focus. On the west side of the construction of Constantinople was a *milarion*, which based on the Roman model indicates how the imperial roads were reckoned (Doerries 1972: 72). This would re-orientate the focus of the empire from Rome to Constantinople as the New Rome⁵⁷. Rome was in decline as a political power at this time Constantinople 'was not only the centre of the empire but simultaneously the seat and symbol of an entire culture' (Doerries 1972: 68, my emphasis; Wilkinson 1993a: 21). As Cary (1993: 555), in discussing symbolic beliefs and distance, states 'the more remote the belief object, the more symbolic the belief'.

However, if we review the developments and characteristics of the Irish monastery (larger settlements), with the description of Constantinople, there are many similarities. The layout of Constantinople was based on Rome (Doerries 1972: 70; Burch 1927: 126). It was ringed, with great walls and at the centre of the city were markets. At the centre of this was a porphyry column of Constantine on a horse but it also shows similar traits to the High Crosses. Socrates Scholasticus (1880:48), from his *Ecclesiastical History of the Church*, under the year A.D.326, reports that wood and nails from the Cross of Christ were placed within this porphyry column. The use of relics and central orientation are characteristics also shared by some of the Irish High Crosses. Many striking similarities can be observed here.

It is important to emphasise the importance of the association of the ringed wall around Irish monasteries and their conception of what a city was. The church of Kildare is described by Cogitosus, 2nd quarter of the seventh century AD:

And who can express in words the exceeding beauty of this church and the countless wonders of that monastic city we are speaking of, if one may call it a city since it is not encircled by any surrounding wall. And yet, since numberless people assemble within it and since a city gets its name from the fact that many people congregate there, it is a vast and metropolitan city. In its suburbs, which saint Brigit had marked out by a definite boundary, no human foe or enemy attack is feared (trans. Connolly and Picard 1987: 26; LSB 32: 8-9 my emphasis)

⁵⁷ Socrates Scholasticus (1880:268), from his *Ecclesiastical History of the Church*, under the year A.D.381, refers to Constantinople as 'New Rome'.

This implies to Cogitosus a city is defined by the presence of a ringed wall. This is in line with the symbolism of the Egyptian *nywt* character of the cross in the circle, discussed earlier⁵⁸. We know from the discussion above that the ringed enclosure was a common occurrence at monastic enclosures. This passage however links its symbolism directly with being a city.

This discussion is circumstantial but may help explain one of the mysteries of the decoration of the Irish High Crosses and that is their lack of vegetal ornamentation when compared to British crosses. We know that the seventh-century Celtic church had disputes with Rome as to the computation of Easter⁵⁹ and the correct form of tonsure (Mytum 1992: 79) and differences in law⁶⁰. It would not be unnatural with two alternative forms of church government that there might be an Irish bias to one sphere of influence over the other. Though there is evidence that Ireland had contact both with Rome⁶¹ and Constantinople as discussed.

There was a split between the east and western churches in the ninth century under Leo III. But differences between the practices of the churches are in evidence as early as the fifth century (Walter 1993: 13). Significantly, Rome was not very receptive to the concept of monasticism that has its origins in the East:

‘By 360 Egypt and Syria had large organised monastic communities and the movement was spreading to Asia Minor and, more slowly, to the West. There met with considerable hostility. In the 380’s a crowd rioted against monks in Rome. At least one Pope was very sceptical of the movement. Monks were jeered at Carthage, persecuted in Spain...The rising tide of martyr and relic worship, closely linked to the monastic movement, was strongly disliked, not only by pagans, to whom the martyrs were simply “criminals” properly executed by the State for breaking the law, but the party in the Church with opposed extreme asceticism’ (Hillgarth 1986: 18-19).

⁵⁸ A hieroglyph from Egypt called *nywt* ⊗ (Budge 1971: 34; Watterson 1993: 135) that means ‘village, town, city’. Rykwert (1976: 192) illustrates this character *nywt* as a vertical cross ⊕.

⁵⁹ Alcuin of York discussed the difference in calculations between the Roman and Egyptian methods is referred to in a letter to Charlemagne A.D. 798 (*Letter 78*; trans. Allott 1974: 93-94)

⁶⁰ Melia has said of Irish Laws: ‘in Ireland in the earliest Christian tracts in Irish often seems to reflect a world view that fails to understand the deep theoretical gulf that separated the orthodox - Roman - law of the church from the native system’ (1982: 371).

⁶¹ A mid-to-late-eighth-century Cross-slab at Kilnasaggart, Co. Armagh has been identified by Henry (1965: 199-120) as an affirmation of loyalty to the Roman church. Mytum (1992: 79) believes that this might have been to commemorate the acceptance of the Roman method of calculating Easter. This would mean that part or all of the church was taking some instruction from the Roman church.

This would indicate that Irish monasticism might not have been popular in Rome where abbots shared influence with bishops⁶². The Irish monastic church may have looked to Constantinople, as their source of spiritual inspiration, rather than Rome with whom they had differences. Another consideration is that the use of foliage in art was frequent in Mediterranean art and we find animals in vine-scrolls more frequently in Northumbrian and Anglo-Saxon art. These regions also had closer links to the Roman church. The Irish preference for the ringed form of the High Cross might have been a symbolic attempt to emphasise independence and differentiation or direct association with the monastic traditions of the east. This was not just an innovation peculiar to Ireland; it was the Irish church declaring its differences from the Roman church. This might also explain the spread of the ringed cross form to areas of Britain where there was contact with the Irish Church.

But what was being represented? There is a Coptic lintel (eighth-ninth centuries) with Saints Pakene and Victor, from Sohag, depicted riding towards a wreathed cross in the centre (Badawy 1978, Fig. 3.149). This demonstrates that from a Coptic perspective the wreathed cross was a location that was visited by holy people. This wreathed cross is very similar to a depiction of the heavenly *templum* from the sixth century *Codex Acerianus, Corpus Agrimensorum* (Rykwert 1976, Fig. 6), discussed earlier as part of the Roman tradition of organising and surveying land by an *augur* quartering a star-studded circle representing a location orientated by the sky (cosmos). This is superficially very close to the *crux gemmata* in appearance. To any Roman a *crux gemmata* might have had the meaning of settlement. It is worth noting that Constantine when he first used the *chi-rho* symbol had a vision of it upon a starry sky and that subsequently became the symbol of his city.

This still does not explain the wide variation of early Irish crosses. One explanation of some of them is that they were attempts to depict a city (location). As discussed, Jerusalem was the central Christian city and synonymous with the city's identity were the structures of the Holy Sepulchre. From the late fourth to the early seventh century there were no cities in Ireland. The number of pilgrims would have been very low at that time and there was a reliance on relics and art from the east for models. The experimentation with the ringed cross form can be explained as not having an understanding of what a city is and also as artistic interpretation and experimentation. This would provide a better context for considering the three dimensional freestanding High Crosses as sharing symbolic/functional elements of what the *chi-rho* represented and this central Christian symbolism. This did not have to be an exact model but emphasises the elements that would have come second

⁶² The features that differentiated the Irish church from Rome have been discussed in detail above.

hand verbally from Arculf or extrapolated from schematic models detailed on the Bobbio pilgrim flasks.

The secular placement of crosses in market places would support the idea that these were showing the centre of a settlement. The growing monasteries – a tradition found broadly over Ireland – would also have wanted a unique declarative symbol. The development of the perforated ringed High Cross is the most complex and tailored expression of this symbol but it is also found in more simple incised forms.

CONCLUSION

This is the end of the evidence and discussion presented in this thesis. This concluding chapter sought to synthesise the various themes presented in this thesis through an explanation of several interrelated factors that were driving the evolution of the unique High Cross form: the intentions of the creators; technical limitations of the medium, innovations and developments of the crosses; the role of the context of their usage; nature and needs of their audience; and the symbolic considerations that guided the form of the artefact as an interpretive context uniting these elements within the High Cross traditions.

Addressing the originality of the monuments, the different areas of investigation presented in this study indicate that here were strong links between Ireland and the East. This is not to suggest that Ireland was solely under the influence of any one culture or church but it does appear that the developing Irish monastic traditions had a special identification with the east. More broadly, there is evidence that Ireland had contact with British, Continental and Mediterranean cultures. All of these regions would have been influential in the development of the early church in the form of artefacts, from trade and pilgrimages, the transmission of new technologies and potentially most influential, new ideas and concepts. There is evidence that the Irish were receptive to new ideas and ways to express themselves from both their written accounts and in their surviving material record. It is in this environment that we see the development, experimentation and refinement of the High Crosses. The consistent use of symbolic elements from the east indicate it was a dominant inspiration behind the development of the High Cross tradition.

This thesis has concluded that in many ways the reason why a High Cross was built was because it was a very specific frame for the Christian message – symbolically and contextually. This frame is

defined by the adoption of key elements of Holy Sepulchre symbolism that were prevalent in the early medieval art and symbolism of other Christian cultures of this time. This concurs with some of the current views on the High Cross; however, this thesis has suggested the re-evaluation of several scholarly identifications of Holy Sepulchre elements within the cross morphology. A notable difficulty for the presentation of any new interpretation of the High Cross form with Holy Sepulchre symbolism is that there appears to have been a myriad of traditions in how to represent the structures of these primary religious sites. This has been illustrated earlier in this Chapter in the discussion of the form of the True Cross. Three credible interpretations of the True Cross form have been detailed above and it is possible that all three could be correct. This does raise some uncertainty into what any study in this area can hope to achieve. However, the contextual approach of this study, based around the principle communication system elements as a template for discussing the High Crosses (creators, cross as medium/text and audience), has allowed some meaningful insights to be reached.

It is the suggestion of this thesis that the High Cross form and symbolism can be closely linked to the Holy Sepulchre monuments at Jerusalem. However, the interpretations suggested by this study are contrary to conclusions made by preceding studies. A significant point of difference is with Richardson's interpretation of capstones, as the canopy over the Holy Sepulchre. It is unlikely assessing Richardson's interpretation of the capstones that they were meant to directly be part of the Holy Sepulchre symbolism. This reassessment of the capstones role takes into account three different factors. Firstly, it can be demonstrated that capstones in an Irish context might represent skeuomorphic or symbolic reliquary boxes of local saints or founders. This is also indicated by the differentiation of capstone forms that appear to conform to the local architectural shapes. Secondly, the eastern examples that Richardson's associates with this tradition are not entirely compelling when examining these pillars, also taking into account their execution and decorative content. Thirdly, within the context of the symbolic re-interpretation of the High Cross form presented in this thesis, her identification is either a tautological or illogical feature.

A morphologic element that is central to this thesis's reinterpretation of the High Cross form is the role of the ring within the symbolic composite. This has involved a more detailed exploration and development on Roe's identification of the ring as halo. The unique development of the perforated ringed head appears to be an attempt to recreate the light of the divine nature of Christ. Furthermore, since this feature can be found in other medieval art, most significantly the domes of eastern churches, that this was the inspiration for this development. These can be shown to be illustrating - through architectural symbolism - the *ego sum lux*. It is possible that Irish artists, under

the influence of non-Irish artists more familiar with this type of symbolism, were adapting this architectural form and symbolism to the High Crosses.

This conclusion is supported by looking at other significant morphological and symbolic developments that occur on the more developed High Crosses at this time. There appears to have been a confluence of several morphological changes at the time: the development of the perforated cross head; we find a more common use of the stepped base (symbolic steps of Golgotha); the symbolism of a cross emerging from the steps of Golgotha, evoking the cross erected at Jerusalem; at this time the bosses at the centre of the cross head are replaced with figurative depictions of Christ. This study has also argued that bosses that remain – boss style or geometric – might be representative of the Rock of Calvary within this theme. Additionally, the development of the rolls or knobs along the perforated sections of the crosshead coincide with the placement of Christ at the centre of the cross. A suggestion of this thesis is that if this placement of Christ is perceived as an architectural development, the rolls might be lamps as part of this structure. While suggesting this interpretation of the more developed perforated ringed crosses, it is uncertain if this was the intention of the initial ringed High Crosses. The apparent faithfulness of the skeuomorphic features would argue against this. There is a change from the High Cross as facsimile of another cross to the cross depicting a location. Furthermore, this changes the symbolism of the High Cross, from the more abstract *crux gemmata*, to being evocative of a moment in Christ's life. The development of many of these features more prominently on later crosses suggests that in some ways the symbolism and purpose of the skeuomorphic cross was hijacked and evolved by other considerations and needs – representing an imbricated symbolic plan over an already existing monumental tradition. Suggesting there was an evolution of the symbolism of the High Cross to directly represent the evolving orientation symbolism of the Irish Church, in relation to the primary Christian sites of Christ's: life, death and return.

This thesis has suggested that several other factors need consideration and can be seen as part of the Holy Sepulchre symbolism. Contextually, the prime association of the use of a cross can be linked to its meaning as a *locus* on the landscape, in the form of an *axis mundi*. Evidence of the organisation of pre-Christian Ireland around these dimensions and the complementarity with Christian teachings has been detailed. The focus of the Christian *axis mundi* was the epicentre at the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem. A challenge for the church was how to communicate the connection to this central element – which is core to the teachings of the Life of Jesus – while remaining locally relevant. Innovations on several levels were implemented to tailor the Christian message to the Irish. A symbolic benefit to a community orientated by an *axis mundi* is that, as discussed above, each

community can have its own local *axis mundi*. In Ireland, a notable feature was the integration of the early Christian church with the kin and corresponding implications in terms of the living and the dead. The early church placed itself at the centre of a community a location previously occupied by the graves of local kin – the crosses assuming this *axis mundi* role. Furthermore, this symbolism of the cross has very clear associations as a device (medium) of spatial organisation and its use within Ireland supports this. This means that the local church was able to maintain a local perspective on the Christian message by adopting kin groups into the Christian family with Jesus as the titular focus. The founder or local saint would have come from the same kin group that established and ran the monasteries in the hereditary positions of Abbot. It is important to recall that the spiritual authority of Christ was passed to his apostles and through them to subsequent church leaders. Additionally, the use of the High Cross as a focus for this would have linked a local community back to Jerusalem and indirectly to the centre of the cosmos where Jesus is located, where the Christian kin passed to after death. The role of the founder as bridge between the current spiritual authority and Christ would have been emphasised by the skeuomorphic or symbolic function of the capstone as local reliquary.

A case for the stronger identification of the ringed cross and cross-in-circle of any form with orientation symbolism has been established in this thesis. The use of freestanding stones as orientation devices has been explained from several perspectives. It appears that the early church systematically developed and replaced the existing belief system and community *locus* with Christian Crosses. Ethnographic evidence indicates that non-Christian traditions used these focal points for a variety of uses: on social, legal and spiritual dimensions. The discussion in the preceding chapters indicate that the freestanding stones, in particular the High Crosses, took over many of these roles as intermediary between community and land; priest and community; and the secular and spiritual.

A defining feature of the early Irish church, from other Christian churches on the continent and the east, is that its congregational architecture is a relatively late development. The Church appears content to use the associations around the *axis mundi* as the 'stage' for its community discourse. While this would have met the needs of an Irish audience this does not necessary mean the church abandoned desires to have the material infrastructure similar to other church traditions. The Church might have still had the desire to replicate a church. The prominence of the Church plans recorded by Arculf and Adomnán indicate this fascination. The morphological innovations that lead to the perforated crosshead, with Jesus at the centre, appear to support the view that they might have found an acceptable compromise. It is worth noting again that the Odzun pillars, while sharing many characteristics with the High Crosses, did not have a ringed head. They did, however, have domed

churches based around the cross-in-square plan that recreated the divine cosmos – there is little reason for their traditions to develop a ringed crosshead. The early Irish Church might have still wanted to orientate themselves – through an artefact – with the location of Christ within the cosmos.

It is important to recall that regardless of the complexity of the architectural execution of the cross-in-square church plan, it is at its most simple the orientation of the universe around the simple cross-in-circle plan, that has been discussed in this study. It is through this device that the monasteries were able to link themselves to the spiritual heart of Christian teachings while remaining locally relevant to their communities. The cross-in-circle becomes, through the cross-in-square architectural associations, an orientation device symbolic of the primary Christian locations. These Christian ‘cities’ become the symbolic identification for the new monastic traditions in Ireland, as replications of the prime Christian city and its history.

EPILOGUE

This study started with the goal of answering the elementary question of *why build an Irish High Cross?* It was hypothesized that this could be achieved by exploring the ‘by whom’, ‘for whom’ and ‘where’ questions of the High Cross tradition in more detail. The purpose of the crosses is best explored by looking at their meaning from within the context that they communicated. To a large extent the meaning of the cross is that the medium is the message. In order to answer the ‘by whom’, ‘for whom’ and ‘where’ questions this has been structured around ‘how’, as a medium, they communicated. The approach that this study employed was to structure this investigation against a communications systems model. The model that was used in this study was a modified transmission model and the structure of the discussion presented in this thesis has reflected the information areas according to these modular components. This has allowed for the creators/authors, the medium, the audience; contextual implications; and issues relating to the nature of the message and how it was encoded and decoded to be explored. In the communications chapter, a second semiotic perspective was introduced. This was to reflect the basic semiotic model of *addresser* → *text* ← *addressee* with the aim of illustrating considerations of the independence of the text (cross) within the decoding process and the role of *feedback* in their development. In summary, Chapter’s Two to Five established both the nature of the medium, creators/authors and contextual issues. Chapters Six and Seven have focused on the utility of the crosses and its message in terms of how they were read by the audience. The concluding chapter attempted to present a synthesis of the different areas of this study, in terms of the cross morphology, symbolism and role within social discourse, in order to explain why they evolved to the apex of this tradition and their final form.

It is useful to review the findings of this thesis from the perspective of the finished discussion. Chapter Two sought to establish current and historical scholarly understanding of the High Crosses from two perspectives: firstly, in terms of the development of their morphology and distinctive form; and secondly, in terms of the symbolic interpretations and associations with this form. The purpose of this was to establish an understanding of the medium as an artefact. What is apparent from this discussion is that the morphology and symbolism of the crosses show signs of evolving as the tradition matured. A question posited at the start of this thesis was: ‘evolving to solve what problem?’ A credible interpretation of the development of the High Cross tradition is that they reflect the changes in artistic ability, material and tools and sophistication of the early Churches spirituality. The changes and refinements, detailed in this study, could be the result of aesthetic considerations or new techniques. Contrary to this, this thesis has argued that the *raison d’être* for

the crosses cannot be limited to either the comprehension of their aesthetic 'values' or iconographic programs alone. Several symbolic, functional and usage reasons have been forwarded in this study against this narrow interpretation. From a morphology perspective, the unity of the cross form appears to reflect the symbolic values of morphological elements rather than adhering to a model for a real cross. That is, we see the cross evolving in expression and complexity away from the original skeuomorphic features. The elements that appear that continue to be developed are those that correlate with elements of the primary Christian site of the Holy Sepulchre. At the same time we see a correlation in the themes relating, directly or indirectly, to the life of Christ. The most common explanation for the distinctive cross form could be explained as symbolising the victory or redemption of Christ. However, the meaning of *the ringed cross* does not appear to be limited to any one interpretation. This study has argued for a reconsideration of the underlying ringed cross symbols' interpretation to being that of orientation symbolism, that can be seen to have a bridging role between the many of the associations that have made with different variations of the cross-in-circle motifs.

The next two sections focused on the nature of the creators of the medium and the message. Chapter Three details the techniques that were used to build the High Crosses and the artists that were likely to have worked on them. It is likely that there was some foreign input, on a technical level at least, contributing to the development of the High Cross form. While the existence of master craftsmen was likely, with supporting craftsmen of different skill levels, the existence of formal workshops remain speculative. Questions remain unanswered from this study, who were the content organisers in the creative process and how this was organised? The more developed crosses also appear to reflect a more educated creator(s) about Christianity, which is a consideration for explaining the disparity of cross forms against the conclusion of this study.

Chapter Four examined the context of the High Crosses development. This was from two perspectives: the pre-Christian belief system and that of the early church. This discussion highlights several important factors in the development of the High Crosses. The first of these is the distinctive monastic nature of early Christianity in Ireland and the strong connections and aspiration to eastern traditions as contexts for their creation. Additionally, the early monasteries can be shown to have close links to the patronage of royal families. This connects the development of the High Cross tradition to that of supporting ruling social institutions. As a medium, this role is similar to that of standing stones in non-Christian belief systems. Furthermore, while the High Crosses can be seen to have 'elite' associations, this study has demonstrated as an artefact and as a medium, they still shared social and spiritual roles in common with other standing stones. The role of Christian freestanding

crosses in general can be seen to have had a role within the 'cult of relics' which can be seen as reinforcing the importance of monasteries and promoting the practice of pilgrimage. However, common to all standing stones are their functional roles as orientation markers in different capacities. The conclusion of these two chapters is that the more elaborate form, decoration and usage of the High Crosses evolved to meet the increasingly complex message of defining the secular position of the church and its relations to the ruling authority to the community as a whole; as well as proclaiming a spiritual message in an informative capacity.

The next chapter sought to explore the 'where' or contextual use and associations of the crosses by further examining their usage in more detail. In that their role within socio-cultural discourse is defined from a holistic perspective by the interaction of messages within this context. This investigation explored standing stones (an *axis mundi* form) as a medium choice in the pre-Christian traditions; focusing on areas where they were complementary or differentiated when compared to Christian usage. From a discourse perspective, standing stones can be shown to function primarily as orientation markers and as such reinforce and articulate secular and religious relations of power within society. More specifically, High Crosses can be shown to function in positioning a community within its boundaries but also in relation to the wider world. Though the representational system of a microcosm, they mediated the communities orientation to the macrocosm. It is important to recognise that this represents a paradigm shift to the Christian orientation and perspective of the cosmos. Other known uses and associations of standing stones were detailed in order to highlight shared or differentiated use of the High Cross from the broader standing stone tradition.

The second part of this study has focused on the perspective of the audience. Specifically, how they decoded the verbal and a verbal messages of the medium and its content. Verbal messages come from the content of the crosses – in terms of iconic, aniconic and linguistic decoration; and the symbolism of the cross form. Additionally, a verbal messages were communicated by the role of the cross within social discourse. In terms of a verbal messages, as material medium, the crosses can be seen as active participants that both facilitate and mediate social interaction between religious and secular institutions and their audiences. As a result, the crosses, within context, would have influenced, what, how and where different individuals performed different social roles. However, it is important that this discussion does not result in the impression that the crosses operated in isolation of other media but instead functioned in relation to other institutions, artefacts and their messages. Other artefacts and meanings, including those that have not survived in the archaeological record, would have affected the intertextual relationship of the medium format and its message.

In terms of how the crosses were read, there are several considerations here: firstly, the changes that the church made to facilitate and control the communication system of its message. This was achieved through a tailored medium of visual depictions, which appear to be developed for an oral culture. Iconic and aniconic depictions were adopted and developed over concurrent traditions of public written communication in the form of *ogam* on standing stones; additionally, Latin did not become a publicly displayed language. Language appears to have been a significant challenge to the communication of the churches message and a key driver of experimentation in this area. The early use of *ogam*, while establishing an intertextual association with the public use of stones as a medium, was too limited in terms of what it could convey. Latin appears to have had too restricted an audience to ever have been considered on a broader basis. The type of communication we find suggests that the crosses were meant to be accessible to a broad audience. The subsequent part of this chapter investigated how the church innovated to communicate its message to a community through visual depictions and how it retained control and guided the interpretation of this message. The development of the frame (panel) to communicate discrete narrative scenes also appears to reflect the needs of an oral culture in terms of narrative flow. From the reader's perspective, several issues need consideration. Foremost is the average reader's capacity to apperceive content based on the complexity of some messages. This suggests, considering the coordination and complexity of some iconographic scenes, that the panel scenes were developed with different levels of understanding in mind based on the 'background books' of the reader. Another consideration for a nominally Christian audience is what role intertextual associations played in terms of content, comprehension and functional readings of the crosses. Additionally, we should also not see the High Cross in isolation of a communication performance, with interpretation, music and ritual likely contributing to their public utility; while not discounting private contemplation and meditation.

The final chapter has attempted to explain the evolving cross morphology that we find on the later crosses in relation to contextual and usage occasions. The conclusion of this chapter is that the developments of the more developed High Crosses reflect the symbolism that was associated with the layout of primary churches found in the east. More specifically, this interpretation explains the development of the perforated ring as an attempt to emulate the inside of the *Noas* and dome of eastern churches – the High Cross functioning as an inverted church.

WHY BUILD A HIGH CROSS?

The investigation of the High Crosses as standing stones shows a concerted effort by the early church to create an artefact that in form was relevant to their purposes in celebrating (declaring) their faith. The historical context of a church indicates that the early practice was to integrate Christian beliefs with the local belief system where possible. The primary area of complementarity between the two belief systems, on spiritual and secular levels, is the practice of orientating the community to the landscape or cosmos. The early crosses appear, paradoxically, to try to function as a familiar contextual orientation media, as well as having to differentiate its message with non-Christian uses of stones (as a medium). As a media tradition, Christian and non-Christian, stones appear to share central orientation symbolism of the *axis mundi* in form and in contextual usage. The complementarity between both belief systems appears to have been the primordial need to orientate oneself to the cosmos.

The Irish High Cross represents a more evolved form of this symbolism. It is uncertain if the initial monumental wooden crosses were ringed – although portable versions were – but the adoption of the ringed form conforms to a long tradition of continental and eastern traditions of marking out orientation. This functional symbolism is given greater gravity in the Christian belief system because of the central theme of Christ and redemption. The most significant location in any Christian's life is the location where Christ died. Christ until he returns is at the centre of the cosmos, and the *axis mundi* was a way of orientating the local community to this central event. Considering the drive of the church to position itself in opposition to the non-Christian belief system, it is not unreasonable that after the initial introduction of Christianity and with the growing capacity to communicate a more complex message, that this central symbolism was not buttressed with further layers of symbolic signification. The evidence of which we find at the apex of the High Cross tradition.

This secondary or imbricated layer of meaning was overlaid over both the skeuomorphic form of the cross and the skeuomorphic functionality (meaning) of the erected cross. It is marked by the morphological changes that culminate with Christ being depicted at the centre of the crosshead. The perspective to understanding this evolutionary process is the role that the High Crosses played within socio-cultural discourse. This thesis has suggested that the motivation behind the continued development of the High Cross form was the complementarity of orientation symbolism with the preceding belief system – spiritually, but also as a medium. Why did the ringed cross form continue to be experimented with from its skeuomorphic form? A central semiotic principle is the concept that a sign gains its meaning not for what it is but from its differentiation from within a shared system

of codes – the relations of difference and sameness within a continuity of meaning¹. Is it possible to perceive this semiotic process in differentiating in the evolution of the crosses?

From a related perspective, Floch (2000: 33-62; 2001), a pioneer of visual semiotics, has explored in this semiotic phenomena analysing visual identity which he defines in terms of difference and continuity. He illustrates this in a modern comparison between IBM and Apple Mac logos. The early development of these two visual identities can be demonstrated to revolve around differences, elements of continuity but also importantly in their relationship to each other. In competitive consumer categories visual (meaning) differentiation is often expressed by a polarization of brand characteristics –degrees of difference within a segment². Floch describes the systematic development of the Apple logo ‘is astonishing because its own visual characteristics appear to be the result of deductive reasoning based on those of the IBM logo. That is, the characteristics seem to come from a systematic inversion of those of the IBM logo’. As visual statements, they are integrated within their own corporate discourses, which he discusses in more detail. They are differentiated by: complexity/simple configurations; cold monochrome/warm polychrome, straight shapes/curved shapes and repetition of identical units and non-repeated shapes. Developing this line of thought further, Floch finds a connection between these developments of these logos and the *canonical model* of Lévi-Strauss’s (1983) visual analysis of tribal masks³. In this study, Lévi-Strauss establishes a ‘canonical formula for the relationship between the correlation and opposition amongst the two types of mask and the semantic functions assigned by the two ethnic groups’ (Floch 2000: 180-181). Lévi-Strauss (1983: 92-93; 1987: 93) states: ‘When, from one group to the other, the visual form is

¹ A pioneer of semiology, Saussure defines this principle: ‘in all cases, then, we discover not ideas given in advance but values emanating from the system. When we say that these values correspond to concepts, it is understood that these concepts are purely differential, not positively defined by their content but negatively defined by their relation with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is that they are what others are not’ (trans. Culler 1976: 26).

² Barthes (1972) in an early study in this field saw the differentiation of washing liquids in terms of descriptive binary oppositions.

³ Lévi-Strauss was also influenced by the writings of Saussure (Hawkes 1977) and Floch was part of the Greimas semiotic school of thought that was influenced by Saussure and Hjelmslev. Sonesson (1994) presents a criticism from a pictorial semiotic perspective on both Lévi-Strauss’s and Floch’s use of Saussure. A key criticism is that visual depictions do not have true oppositions when compared to ‘a system of constitutive oppositions present in the phonological or semantic organizations of a verbal language’. Additionally, Sonesson questions compatibility of psychological insights into perception that the arbitrary nature of these structural approaches do not account for. Clearly, there is not scope within this study to attempt to investigate the merits of this structuralist approach in relation to visual depictions. Lévi-Strauss’ visual application of the canonical formula on masks represents part of a much larger analysis of *myth*. However, contrary to the evolutionary approach of this study it does allow for an asynchronic perspective on history and evolution (Hawkes 1977:20). This approach allows ‘the minute examination of a system of a given moment of its evolution, laterally’ (Poole 1969:12). In a recent study, Maranda (2001: 5) has suggested that we should perceive the canonical formula, like Lévi-Strauss sometimes described it, as a metaphor. As a descriptive model, it does assist in structuring the themes and conclusions presented in this thesis.

maintained, the semantic function is reversed, whereas when the semantic function is maintained, the visual form is reversed⁴. A schematic of the tribal masks is illustrated in Fig 254. Floch goes into more detail and finds other examples in anthropology and art to explore this process further⁵.

The initial purpose of the High Cross has been suggested in this study to be a communication development in order to adopt and develop existing and familiar medium associations; however, this does not fully explain the motivations or driving forces behind evolution of the cross form. Cross forms can be organised according to Lévi-Strauss's canonical formula, see Fig.255. While this model is an asynchronic model the way it is used here obviously reflects diachronic factors. Considering the relationship of the first three forms from the left: comparing A and B, the early crosses differentiated themselves against non-Christian orientation media – standing stones – primarily in meaning rather than visually. Visually they have amorphic forms –differentiated in opposition with some inscribed decoration, primarily a cross. The differentiation of message was the primary consideration: Christian vs non-Christian. Comparing the other side of the formula, B and C: while there is a continuity of meaning between the early freestanding crosses and the skeuomorphic High Crosses, they are more differentiated by visual form – in meaning they are still primarily declarative symbols of faith: representing Christ's cross. Other oppositions can further differentiate them: architecturally complex vs amorphous forms; aniconic vs absence of decoration; central locations within a community vs sacred site; natural forms vs civilized forms. We also see an inversion of the amorphous form, inscribed with a cross, from A to C to the form now being the cross itself.

The position of this thesis is that there is a strong continuity between all standing stones as orientation markers - that defines them as a medium in this context. However, a proposition raised as a conclusion to this study is that the more developed High Crosses were attempts to portray (function) as inverted churches following eastern inspirations. With this in mind, we can see an inversion between the early and later High Cross forms, comparing C to D. Visually, the ringed form remains similar but what and how the message is communicated has changed: aniconic vs iconic,

⁴ An assessment of this canonical formula has recently been completed by Maranda, et al. (2001) who have explored this 'formula' from different perspectives. Additionally, a more recent example of this was illustrated by Lévi-Strauss (2001: 15-32) in a study of the 'hourglass' configuration present in the architectural structures of Japanese and regional huts of neighbouring cultures

⁵ Notably Floch draws attention to an observation of this process by Panofsky (1972) in the medieval treatment of classical motifs and themes. Hénaff (1998: 190-213) discusses the impact of Lévi-Strauss on our perceptions of art in more detail from a theoretical perspective. More recent studies have in a post-structuralist perspective have argued for a clearer understanding of the processes behind these changes (Pateman 1984, Thomas 1995). Thomas (1995:25) has argued that a historical context analysis 'will be less concerned with the transformations of structure than the practices that displace (or seek to displace) one account of structure by making another explicit'. This insight to the historical aspect can be shown to be relevant to the development of the High Crosses in terms of what structures are displaced.

solid-ringed vs perforated ringed; single depictions vs narrative themes; a change from representing a model (skeuomorph) of a cross, through the *crux gemmata*, to representing a location and possibly a moment of in Christ's life – evoking the crucifixion, his rebirth and transfiguration to divinity; and generally increasing complexity in morphologies and associated symbolism that has been described in this thesis.

Floch (2001) in his analysis of the logos, highlights the apparent 'deductive reasoning' that appears to have influenced the development of the two brand images along the lines of opposition and continuity. Floch departs from Lévi-Strauss in that he indicates conscious intent within this process, which reflects the more pre-mediated and coded nature of the advertising message. The similarities between the process of cross development and advertising/ educational messages were discussed above. Experimentation with the cross form indicates that the master artisans, the directors of the content, of the later High Crosses were not obligated to follow set models that resulted in the early skeuomorphic crosses. A central element in Lévi-Strauss's mythic and artistic theory is that they serve to overcome social contradictions. The shared meanings and associations of the standing stones and freestanding crosses might have been perceived a contradiction to later generations.

The driving force behind the continued experimentation and evolution of the cross form might be explained by this process of visual differentiation around a central continuity of a medium tradition (and its contextual orientation usage). The later church might have found it desirable to further differentiate itself from the early days of syncretic Christianity. Alternatively, another motivating consideration might be the shift to more naturalistic depictions of the crucifixion compared to the symbolic *crux gemmata*. As Hawkes (1977:56) defines the structuralist perspective on the role of art: 'it reveals to us, particularly in its account of the nature of myth, the confirming, supportive, problem-resolving nature of all art. It thus strengthens the notion that art acts as a *mediating*, moulding force in society rather than as an agency that merely reflects or records''.

This differentiation or opposition was arranged on the shared continuum of orientation. On a more literal level, the symbolism of this location was not just signified by the *axis mundi* of a cross symbol but by the architectural structures at Jerusalem that marked his tomb. Furthermore, this thesis has suggested that the High Crosses were not just static models of these structures but were recreations of the house of God tailored to interact, have a discourse, with a particular audience. The decline of the High Cross tradition corresponds to the development of larger churches for communities. On a symbolic level, this reflects the more normative Christian model of the house of god orientated to an

imago mundi compared to the High Cross, as *axis mundi*, that reflects the needs of a community used to worshipping outdoors.

In summation, Why build an Irish High Cross? The conclusion of this thesis is there were several contributing factors. It was to function as a tailored medium to act as a surrogate for a church to the specific needs an Irish audience. The visual decoration – message content and format – that we find on the crosses appears to be tailored for an oral culture and their specific communication needs. They appear from a social discourse perspective to reflect and articulate the power relations and unity of the secular elite and church as governing social institutions. The church needed to re-orientate the spiritual focus of the population to itself, in relation to the Christian cosmos, as well as integrate itself at the centre of the changes unfolding in proto-urban Ireland. Furthermore, the ruling elite within this socio-cultural change would have had their own positions legitimised. Importantly, as a *public medium*, High Crosses communicated their roles and in relation the roles of the lay audience. The ringed High Cross form is symbolic of the Holy City and evocative of the new monastic communities that were evolving. They orientate these new communities as mediators, through the matrix of their messages, to the centre of the Christian world - locally and cosmically.

ABBREVIATIONS

B.A.R	<i>British Archaeological Reports</i>
IHCPS	<i>Irish High Crosses: Photographic Survey</i> (Harbison 1992)
JRSAI	<i>The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.</i>
PRIA	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i>
RCAHMS	<i>The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland</i>
UJA	<i>Ulster Journal of Archaeology.</i>

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